SHORT STORIES

No. 790. Week Ending February 20, 1904. Price One Penny.

"I will never marry him! As he once rejected me, so do I now reject him!" she cried.

(A Thrilling Incident from the Dramatic Story "The Revenge of Barbara Walker." See inside.)

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SHORT STORIES

No. 790.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending February 20th, 1904.

Her Desperate Venture.

The Tale of a Desecrated Ideal.

THE brilliant October morning, promising so much, had clouded over. Valerie Blanchard declined going for a walk; the wind did not improve her complexion at nine-and-twenty as it had at nineteen. She half envied insignificant Doris Norwood, who would come back all abloom like a wild rose, her bluish-grey eyes full of violet lights. Youth was charming, and there could be but one youth.

"I have a headache," she said, sharply.

"But it may cure your headache, and freshen you up a bit."

All such illusions, however innocently made, held a sting for her now.

"No, run along by yourself, Doris! I shall go to bed. It looks as if a storm might blow up."

"And a storm will spoil the foliage. I must see the hills once more in their glory."

Doris tripped down the wide lawn path bordered with chrysanthemums, with a wall of late dahlias at the back. Miss Blanchard went to her room. The grate fire was laid, and she touched a match to it. The apartment was soon in a glow. She did not go to bed, but dropped into a capacious arm-chair.

To-day was her birthday. Her cousin, Ellen Norwood, had forgotten, for which Valerie felt thankful. Just now she was at odds with the world, with life, with everything. A handsome woman, whose triumphant girlhood lay behind her, whose later triumphs were as nothing, now they had passed, and whose future——

She had come to this dull little Westborough to consider and decide it; to economise in purse and in strength, after a wearing summer campaign, and to make up her mind to marry Digby Kemp. He was old—past sixty—and there was much that was artificial about him. He was rich and luxurious, always travelled with a valet and a man, if he took his horses. Twenty years before he had buried his wife and his son. Since then he had been constantly in Society. He had a handsome town house, and gave elegant dinners to his lady friends, with some unexceptional matron to play propriety. Women had tried their utmost for him, and so far failed.

Miss Blanchard had not tried, but he had made her an urgent offer with generous settlements. At first she was quite incredulous, and suspected some ulterior motive. She was an elegant, well-trained Society woman, and when made up did not look a day over twenty-five—was indeed regal.

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She had been extravagant, and some losses had made rather startling inroads upon her capital. She did not like poverty. This little round in which her cousin lived would kill her. Of course it was restful, and just what she needed now.

Next year she would be thirty. Looking over that was like peering down a chasm. The best of single life would be gone. If she were not tall, stately and imperious, she would have been relegated to the wall ere this. So far she had held her own bravely. What did it all amount to? The flower of young marriageable men were not for her. There were widowers and somewhat *passé* bachelors—and love was at a discount. Did she care to be loved? Why, Digby Kemp was certain he loved her with the fervour of youth. How much of the fervour of middle life had he wasted on pretty actresses? Faugh!

She never said to herself she had been waiting a whole year for a sign, and that now her hope was like a little heap of grey ashes. Nothing could kindle the hope again; but the sting of the old love remained. Had she never met anyone equal to that youthful lover? Well, she had never loved anyone in that fashion since, though she had played with love, and more than one heart had been laid at her feet. She had tried to forget. Yet a year ago her pulses suddenly thrilled and the flame leapt up anew, at a few lines she saw in a paper. Yes, over a year she had waited. He had not married. She had read of men and women who had waited half a lifetime with no absolute promise between them. And this had been only ten years, ten fast-flying, delightful years.

Why could she not make up her mind to answer Mr. Kemp? She had pleaded for a month, and three weeks were gone already. It was time she was married. Here she could still be a queen in the fashionable world. What utter folly to hesitate!

The room grew warmer. A soft drowsiness pervaded her nerves and brain. Outside long, black drifts went scurrying across the sky, each one breaking into a gust of wind that racketed like a tornado, creaking and groaning through the trees, and sweeping up the falling leaves in great windrows. It was only a vague music floating through her sleepy senses. Then something roused her. A confusion of voices and sounds of hurrying, scraping feet in the wide porch startled her. She sprang to the window. The door opened, and there was a shriek. She hurried down the wide stairs, and stood in the hall dazed and speechless, as her eyes met those of the lover of her youth.

He was the first to recover.

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"I am answerable for a sad accident, I fear," he began in a grave tone of concern. "We have Miss Norwood—how much she is hurt we cannot tell. I have sent for the physician. We judged it best to bring her home at once——"

"Yes."

She stood like one in a dream. A tall, regal woman in the affluence of mature beauty, her complexion softened by the warmth and touch of slumber, her eyes dewy, her lips in beguiling scarlet curves; her white cashmere gown trailing around her in billowy softness, the lace open at the neck and showing her shapely throat; and her slim, fair hands dropped at her side.

"Where shall we take her?" said one of the bearers of the improvised stretcher.

"Oh! Yes—to her room, I think," rousing herself. "This way."

She preceded them upstairs, and opened the door of a large room that Doris shared with her mother. There was a wide Turkish couch, and they laid her on this.

"Her mother——" Boyd Jeffries began.

"Mrs. Norwood is out—attending some church meeting. Is she——" Miss Blanchard shuddered.

"She is unconscious. She was startled by the report of a gun, I judged, and a young tree she grasped for support gave way. She came crashing down at our feet. The shot was in another direction. There must have been a landslip some hours before; there was an accumulation of fresh earth we noticed as we were passing. You had better summon her mother," he said, authoritatively.

Miss Blanchard turned.

"Give me the message," said the man who had helped to bring her in. "It will be on my way."

Valerie Blanchard began to recover her presence of mind. With gentle touches she divested the girlish figure of its wrappings.

"There is a faint pulsation," remarked Jeffries. "What a sweet, innocent child's face! It looks like a bit of sculpture."

"She is hardly more than a child. I ought not to have let her go—at least I ought——"

Jeffries bit his lip and frowned unconsciously. Miss Blanchard was trying restoratives and chafing the dimpled hands, several shades browner than her own. There had been so much between these two, and yet he would rather have gone to the world's end than have met her, and she would gladly have gone to the world's end to meet him. It had come about by the purest accident; yet as they stood there they might better have been the veriest strangers with no past between them.

He could not go. The commonest politeness compelled him to remain and apologise for his unwitting share of the transaction; and his own interest in the result held him. For many minutes no word was spoken. All Miss Blanchard's delicate efforts were fruitless.

"You were out hunting?" she ventured presently. The silence seemed insupportable.

"Yes." Briefly, and without raising his eyes from Miss Norwood's face.

She hated the child bitterly. She had treated her with the rather contemptuous tender tolerance one gives to a pretty kitten. Did she recognise a possible rival? If this man had waited ten years and loved no other woman, must there not have been something—and now for this chit to come between! Valerie had never studied the face before. It was a rather short oval, with a low brow clustered about with bronze-brown tendrilly curls. The lids of the closed eyes were almost transparent, and defined the shape of the long eyeballs. They were edged with a long, silken fringe. A small, straight nose, lovely lips, and a rounded chin that sloped down to the white throat. An insignificant little thing she had considered her. Yet she was really beautiful with the budding sweetness of first youth.

"Are you staying at Westborough?" she asked after another silence.

He glanced up inquiringly. Whatever he had meant to sa died away on his lips, and he merely answered, "Yes," again.

"He is bitterly resentful," she thought.

There was a diversion in the embarrassing interview, a swift rustle up the stairs, and Mrs. Norwood came flying in with a shriek as she threw herself beside the couch.

"No, she is not dead," he said. "Believe me, madam. As soon as the doctor comes——"

The carriage drove up. Jeffries ran down and held a few moments' conversation with him, briefly explaining the manner of the fall. She had struck on her shoulder on the soft earth, but what had happened in her downward descent they could not tell.

"I will wait here. You may need a steady hand if there are any bones broken. And I shall be anxious to hear the verdict."

Dr. Fields bowed. Jeffries paced up and down under the large trees. A fine, drizzling rain had set in. The air was chilly and penetrating, but the man's pulses hammered all his being to a strange white heat. He had come upon Valerie Blanchard utterly unprepared, and the resolves, the hatred, the contempt had almost died as he remembered his olden infatuation.

"I wonder why she has not married?" he said hoarsely to himself. "A woman like that does not go begging. There was the talk about the French marquis—the family was impoverished, to be sure, and old French castles are wanting in comforts. Ten years is a long while. She was just nineteen, I remember. She said she would wait. But she was engaged to Fessenden—that I am certain of. I wonder——"

He gnawed the end of his moustache, and drew his brows into a savage frown. Did any point of honour hold him? What an unfortunate episode to meet in this way! He had counted on seeing her someone's wife, if he saw her at all. And to find her the same, perhaps—no, not the same, after all these years.

It was quite dark when Dr. Fields came down.

"It is concussion of the brain and a dislocated shoulder. I cannot tell just yet, but I do not anticipate anything fatal. And the superb coolness and presence of mind of the girl staying with them is worth everything. I shall look in about nine this evening, but I do not count on any change. Jump in with me."

Jeffries sprang in and shivered as he settled himself. Then he exclaimed suddenly:

"But I thought——"

"They are best let alone for the present. The mother is almost wild. Miss Blanchard will do and say all that is necessary."

"I am taking you out of your way——"

"Not at all. I was going over to Kingswood when the man came. So I shall pass Old Place on my way."

"You are quite sure Miss Norwood——"

"There is every reason for hoping. She is young and her frame is elastic, but I am not sure that it is a sensible thing to go wandering about in dangerous places. They have been taking out sand, and the point above had caved in. The prospect is fine, and it is a favourite walk. There are some beautiful wild flowers. But its insecurity must be understood."

"I'll send some men out in the morning to render it less dangerous. Here we are at Old Place. Thank you."

Jeffries walked up the broad avenue lined with tall elms. There had been generations of Jeffries here. After newer homes had been built this had been termed "The Old Place," and finally the article had been dropped. For several years it had been in the care of a keeper while its owner was abroad. He had died at length, and during the past summer it had been opened and renovated by the heir, a nephew, who had passed some of his early years in its sheltering walls.

Valerie Blanchard came out at her very best in this sudden disaster. Society training had not been quite worthless, since it had given her steady nerves, and a kind of disciplined brain. She restrained Mrs. Norwood's passionate anxiety and frantic forebodings. She was soothing, really gentle, a kind of grand gentleness that held one in check. And now she was minded to make herself not only necessary but really admirable.

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Presently she brought up a dainty little tea, and in spite of Mrs. Norwood's indifference, she tempted her into sipping the tea and eating the toast.

"It will not do to waste your strength in the beginning," she said kindly.

Then they waited. Mrs. Norwood paced the floor until Valerie, with gentle insistence, drew a chair to a point where she could watch Doris, and be in range of the cheerful fire. She took up a book, but now and then said a comforting thing to the poor mother. And so the slow hours toiled on till the doctor came.

"She looks so like death," and Mrs. Norwood's voice quivered with fear.

"But she is not dead. Indeed, I trust she is a long way from it. Everything about her is more favourable than it was five hours ago. Will you remain with her through the night?"

This to Miss Blanchard.

"Oh! thank you!" she cried. "I would gladly suffer it all over again for that result."

"Most assuredly," with a slight inclination of the beautiful head, and eyes full of sympathy.

"When she wakes, answer her questions with no air of mystery, but do not let her waste her strength in talking. Fever may supervene—then she is to have this medicine. But if she is quiet, do not disturb her. To-morrow we may count confidently on a change—I do not really expect it before. But note the slightest variation in her. If she appears to be sinking, give her this." He touched the second phial.

Both women settled to their watch. Past midnight, Mrs. Norwood succumbed to the fatigue and anxiety and drowsed. Valerie seemed as if she would never sleep again. She was almost breathless with retrospection. She had been a little weak in that old time. She should have held him more securely! She might have known his uncle would relent, all the sooner, perhaps, if she had married him. But the certainty of poverty appalled her then. Now, as she thought her life over, it seemed rather singular that she had not married. Was there some curious interposition of Fate? It gave her a sense of exultation.

When the doctor came in the next morning, Valerie was curiously fresh, and evinced no trace of fatigue.

"She has moved of her own accord," Miss Blanchard announced. "Half an hour ago she opened her eyes."

"That is promising. Now I am going to dismiss you two ladies for an hour. Mrs. Norwood had better go to bed at once. You are a marvel," and Dr. Fields smiled. "But there will be more real nursing presently."

"Dissipation may have its wise purposes. I am quite used to being up at night," and Valerie gave him a half-deprecating, half-enchanting, look.

"Your steady nerves have been invaluable. But for you, I must have remained myself. The one most interested at such a crisis is the one least to be depended upon. I saw your courage. It speaks in every gesture. And one doesn't always meet it conjoined with ready sympathy. Go now, and get a little rest."

"I will be back in an hour," she said softly, with an appreciative deference that had found its way to more than one man's heart.

Valerie was as good as her word. The mother was asleep.

"She has spoken," said Dr. Fields, "though she does not remember what has occurred. She is not out of danger, but all the chances are in favour of her recovery."

Down the road a short distance he met Mr. Jeffries and announced the good tidings to him in a few words.

"It will be safe to call this afternoon," he said.

Valerie Blanchard stationed herself at the window, where she could watch the callers. Mrs. Norwood had risen, much refreshed. Luncheon was past, and the dull, rough sky showed signs of clearing. A few anxious inquiries were settled with messages. Then Mrs. Norwood went down to meet the rector's wife, and she was lingering in the porch when Jeffries walked up the path. Valerie frowned savagely. She had trusted to her woman's wit to manage this interview, and it had been snatched out of her very hands. How long it seemed! What were they talking about all this time?

Mrs. Norwood had praised her warmly. Boyd Jeffries had expressed his sincere regret for the accidental part he had taken in what might have proved a tragedy. He hoped to be allowed to send Miss Doris some choice fruit and flowers, and see her presently, when she could receive visitors.

"You will be most welcome at any time. And I cannot see that it was your fault, since you did not fire the shot."

"The old story of poor dog Tray," and he smiled. "I have never been especially fond of shooting innocent birds, and shall eschew such pastime in the future, I assure you."

"What a long call Mr. Jeffries made!" Valerie cried, rather impatiently, as Mrs. Norwood entered the room. "Was he duly penitent?"

"It was not his fault. And he has sent his men out to the woods to-day to take down the treacherous edge, though it is not absolutely his affair. He is really charming."

"You have known him—how long?"

"Why, I have not known him at all. Old Place has been

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shut up four or five years, and we have only been here three, you know. Last autumn Mr. Jeffries was brought here for burial, and there was some gossip about the young man—though he is thirty or past. There was some difficulty years ago—a love affair, I believe, and the young man quarrelled with his uncle, and went away. Later on they had some odd kind of encounter on the Continent, and became friends again, and he was devoted to his uncle after that. There is a great deal of property, I believe. The old gentleman was very rich. Old Place has been greatly improved. The Jeffries' estate consisted of a great deal of the river front, which is now very valuable, since Westborough has become a thriving town."

"And the girl who was the cause of the—whom the difference was about, I mean?"

"Oh, no one knows anything about her. She was quite a Society belle, I believe. I daresay she was married long ago."

Valerie Blanchard considered some moments.

"In such cases the woman—the girl—is often blamed. In this case—she has married no one. If he had listened to her, much of the trouble might have been averted."

"You knew her?" Mrs. Norwood ejaculated, in surprise. Then she studied her cousin intently.

"I knew her, yes. Both were very young. He was dependent upon his uncle, who, wisely enough, considered them too young to marry. She was willing to wait. He insisted on an immediate marriage, and that she should trust to his energy and industry. She saw that such a step would wreck his life at once, and perhaps break kindly relations with his uncle. So she withstood his eager pleading. He was irritated with her, quarrelled with his uncle, went abroad in some capacity, and for awhile was lost to sight. Then the difficulty with his uncle was made up. But the other——"

"Why, he owes her some reparation, surely!" cried Mrs. Norwood indignantly. "Has he never sought her out? Perhaps she would not receive him!"

"He has never made the slightest overture. Since old Mr. Jeffries' death he has been quite free, even if he felt himself bound by duty until then."

"Oh, the poor girl! Can you not do something for her, Valerie? He doesn't seem like a man who could be so cruel! And he must know that she has waited for him."

"You think I might—that I ought to try? There is an old proverb that 'It's ill-meddling with other people's love affairs.'"

"I shouldn't mind proverbs. Why, he ought to give her the opportunity to accept him, if she cared to. He might not know if she has remained single all these years. Yes, I should try"—and a soft flush of eagerness lighted Mrs. Norwood's face.

"Ellen, I beg of you to keep this secret, even from Doris. I am not sure I had a right to betray it. And I think—if I can find an opportunity——"

"Oh, you shall find that!" She smiled a little.

That afternoon Doris seemed to awake from a troubled sleep. She watched her mother for many seconds.

"Mamma!" faintly. "Is it you? Where have I been? I feel so strange and weak."

"Yes, dear. You have been ill. But you are better now, and will soon be well again."

Then Doris closed her eyes, and drowsed off to dreamless slumber.

For several days there was little alteration. Valerie was an indefatigable nurse. Dr. Fields sounded her praises enthusiastically, was indeed fascinated with her himself. Mrs. Norwood felt conscience-smitten that she had never known her worth before. Their paths had lain in such different directions. Mr. Norwood had been an engineer, and Mrs. Norwood's marriage had practically shut her out of the sphere in which she might have moved.

Her husband's death had reduced her to poverty, but soon after this an old aunt, whose favourite he had been, left all her fortune to Doris, charged with a life-right to the mother. This consisted of a pretty old-fashioned but substantial house, with two acres of land in lawn and garden, and some bank and railway stock. Several of her relatives had looked her up to congratulate her. She and Miss Blanchard had crossed each other's orbit accidentally, and Valerie had come to Westborough as a place of refuge while she was settling her future plans, though she put it down to a desire to find some quiet place in which to recruit. Now that she had heard Boyd Jeffries' brief story, she recalled the fact that his uncle, who had made such havoc with their youthful attachment, lived in a small manufacturing town. Had Fate interposed signally in her behalf?

It was comforting to think so. Yet the matter must be entirely taken into her own hands, she foresaw. She must make the first advances. He was in no haste to see her. He called every day, but never asked for her, and only twice entered the house. But Valerie Blanchard was wary and patient where she had an object to gain. She made herself attractive to the doctor by her womanly sweetness and intuitive knowledge or appreciation. And Mrs. Norwood was beginning to be strangely fascinated. She was the more ready to be generous because she fancied she had been unjust in her first impressions.

"I want you to see Mr. Jeffries," she said, one morning. "He knows what you have been to us in this time of trial, but he seems to think he has no right to take my time whilst Doris needs such close attention."

"You surely have not proposed to inflict me upon him as your substitute?" And Valerie gave a short laugh. "Cousin Ellen, let the matter come about naturally, or not at all. I may not be able to plead my friend's cause to any advantage. I certainly shall not injure it by dragging it in with undue haste or imprudence. When Doris is better he will wish to see her, and we can make acquaintance by degrees. I daresay he has seen enough of Society to be slightly *blasé*, and imagine that because he has known a few women he is entitled to judge all. That is a man's way. They seldom make any allowance."

"My dear Valerie, men are not the only sinners in this respect." Mrs. Norwood flushed a little and smiled in a beseeching fashion. "I have made a great mistake about you, and I sincerely beg your pardon. You are so different from all my impressions of you. I have looked upon you as a mere fashionable woman, caring for nothing but admiration, and—very unjustly, I think, rumour had given you the reputation of a coquette."

"Because I have not married, I suppose?" Miss Blanchard interrupted bitterly. "Cousin Ellen, how many men do you imagine have wanted to marry me for my handsome face? They are like moths in a flame. Did any of them take pains to learn whether I had any heart or not, any qualities that would make a satisfactory home? And if I longed for something better than mere appreciation of my beauty——"

Her voice broke a little, her eyes were lustrous with a certain dewiness.

"My dear Valerie!" Mrs. Norwood clasped her arms about her neck and kissed her warmly. "I am glad to have had this glimpse of your heart. No sister could have been more tender to Doris, and I had fancied she was rather tiresome to you."

"We change a little with years and experience. Fancy my trying to be as youthful and kittenish as Doris! Why, I should make a complete guy of myself. And if I tried to make her as worldly and experienced as my years give me the right to be, I should spoil her youthful charm. It would be cruel of me."

"Yes, I see," answered the mother.

"Doris must remain a sweet, innocent little maiden for years to come. Wisdom would crown her like a grandmother's hood. Between us there is quite a gulf." And Valerie laughed.

She had made a fast friend of Mrs. Norwood.

That day's post brought a letter from Mr. Kemp. Her month had expired. He made his excuse his anxiety about her health, but he was very importunate about her assent to his suit. He proposed visiting her at Westborough.

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She hesitated some time with the letter in her hand. It was too good a chance to lose. She had considered it in all its bearings. The Kemps were not a long-lived family. Out of seven or eight children, only two had gone past middle-life. Miss Kemp was nearing seventy and very frail. Her fortune would go to her two nieces, and render them quite heiresses. Two nephews had inherited their father's fortune. Digby Kemp could endow his wife with all his own, and as a widow she would be the envied of her sex. Was it worth while to throw away such an opportunity for a bit of old romance, and a man who had ceased to care for her?

Then her anger blazed up to white heat. She would make one effort to bring him to her feet, even if he rejected her. If Digby Kemp had asked her eighteen months ago, before she had heard the sequel of Boyd Jeffries' fortune! If some event had taken the opportunity out of her hands! But here it was staring her in the face, tempting her with the old passionate tenderness that she had never been quite able to efface.

She answered his letter with the most delicate discretion, making the most of her cousin's accident and the necessity of her further stay. To have him come now would be most inconvenient. He had only to be patient if he really cared for her. But it would be cruel to leave these relatives in their trouble and anxiety. She would write to him again.

A fortnight had elapsed before Doris was able to see visitors. Boyd Jeffries was certain Miss Blanchard would be present and he was not mistaken. For more than a fortnight he had heard her praises continually. Had he been mistaken in her? Had she changed? Had the worldly-wise girl developed into the sympathetic, tender woman?

Yet he could not rouse that old enthusiasm. Passion for her lay dead. The girl he had loved so ardently had existed only in his youthful fancy. His meeting her had surprised him, but no pulse thrilled with vivifying warmth. Dr. Fields might as well have talked of a statue.

So when he entered the room she sat at the head of the couch with a trifle of silk knitting in her hand, and their greeting was simply polite. Doris stretched out a soft hand, white enough now, and smiled.

"I have to thank you for all your beautiful flowers, and such grapes and peaches as I have never seen before. You have been very solicitous, mamma said. And you are not to blame yourself, for you were not the cause of the accident, since you did not fire the gun."

"That was a mere chance—a sort of quibble—since I was with the party, and had the same intent."

He sat down, still holding the hand whose pulse seemed to throb with a soft, warm rapidness that thrilled him.

"I should have been braver," and the pale rose lips curved with a half smile. "But the sound startled me, and I caught the sapling, never dreaming it was so near the edge. I think I must have leant against it a little, and over we both went. What might have happened if you had not been there——" And she shuddered. "I did not know of the landslip. I came up from the other side."

"Did your mother tell you that I had forsworn shooting round about here? It may do well enough for Western wilds or Northern forests. I think a man can find better pleasure than the exercise of cruelty to harmless birds."

"Oh, thank you!" she cried, raising her soft, gratified eyes to his. "I would gladly suffer it all over again for that result. It seems the one terror of autumn. I cannot bear to have them killed."

"It is your ring," she said. "I have kept it all these years."

Something in the sweet, innocent face touched him, took him back to the youth of faith and high endeavour that this other woman had come so near wrecking. What if he began his life over again? At two-and-thirty it was not too late.

The other deep eyes were watching him narrowly. They saw that old light dawn like a flash and then vanish. Another woman could call it into existence, a mere child! She could have strangled her in that instant's anger, so vexed she was that *her* charms had failed.

Mrs. Norwood had been arranging the flowers. She stood the table with its choice burden at the foot of the couch which was Doris' change by day.

"Oh, how lovely! Mr. Jeffries, you must be passionately fond of flowers. And there are Parma violets."

"Yes." He drew some out and laid them in her hand. "There was a large verandah at Old Place glassed in, and my man has made a delightful conservatory of it. It adjoins my library. When you have recovered, your mother must bring you over some day. There are a greenhouse and vinery besides. I have knocked about the world so much that a home of one's own seems good. And Westborough looks really picturesque to me, with the high-wooded range at the north, and the river winding in and out. Some of my early days were passed here, but I am afraid I thought it stupid then."

"Go on," said Doris in a quaint, persuasive fashion. "We have looked at the place so many times while it was shut up.

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And this summer it has blossomed into strange beauty. Tell me about the inside. It is a very old house, I believe ?"

Mrs. Norwood was curiously interested. With her kindly gratitude and tact she made the talk more general, appealing to Valerie now and then, who posed in her most seductive fashion while her heart was seething with rage. To play a second part—when she had been first with this man !

"I have stayed unconscionably," he declared an hour later. "If I have tired you or made you worse, Dr. Fields will forbid me the house." And he rose.

"You have not tired me. Why, I feel almost well," and she smiled mirthfully. "I have been spoilt by indulgence. Cousin Valerie and mamma have been so devoted !"

Jeffries came the next day and the next. As soon as Doris was able to be taken out he sent the carriage for the use of the ladies. Valerie would not go. She pleaded some important letters to write, and that done she indulged in a very unusual thing—a stroll through the woody edges of the hills. It was a solitary ramble.

Sometimes it seemed to her as if she should go quite mad with a sense of her own impotence. If Jeffries had shunned her, if now and then he had betrayed some consciousness of the past, a touch of embarrassment, an expression off guard ; but to her he was always the courteous gentleman whom she might have met for the first time on the day of the accident. She was more beautiful than ever. The rest had improved her in many ways. Could these magnificent charms make no impression on him ? They had parted in passionate anger ; now she could not rouse him to a hasty retort.

Was he in love with this silly, honest, unformed girl, fifteen years his junior ? What idiocy ! To spend his life and his fortune in a philanthropical effort to benefit this ugly manufacturing town—for now he was on a committee to consider a public library, and another looking to the erection of a home for old people. And he, in the prime of manhood, with a presence and the gifts of nature that would distinguish him in Society ! Why, even to save him from such a mental suicide would be worthy any woman's effort.

She used her arts to perfection. He neither sought her nor shunned her. He really enjoyed sensible, sincere, well-informed Mrs. Norwood, and began to take a hearty interest in her charities. Doris he treated like a little sister, with the delicate, indescribable touch that defined the lack of relationship. And so things progressed.

Summer came with flowers and sunshine. Valerie's old lover grew urgent. Time was flying on the fleetest of wings. She must take the matter in her own hands. For now she did not mean to relinquish him without an effort. She would render it difficult for him to banish all the remembrances of the past. She was desperate enough to make an appeal that no man of fine honour would resist, she imagined.

They had been invited over to Old Place to dine. They were to be sent for quite early that they might have time enough before dark to inspect the house and the curiosities brought from abroad.

Jeffries had announced this to a visitor staying in the house for a few days. He had said :

"Wait, Jack, and meet one of the most magnificent women you have ever seen. I think her destiny is to show the world what a royally beautiful woman can be. You can go back the day after."

"Is that all her destiny—to simply look beautiful for the world ?" and his friend gave a meaning smile.

"So far as I am concerned—yes."

"How has a place like this raised such a marvel ?"

"Oh, she is not a native ! She has been a London beauty."

"And what may be this wonder's name ? Have I heard of her ?"

"No doubt ; and met her as well. Miss Valerie Blanchard."

Jack Spencer gave a half-laughing whistle.

"Why, yes," he said, "though I only know her very slightly. But I believe she is to shine shortly in a new orbit. Somehow, last summer, she caught one of the matrimonial prizes. She is no 'chicken,' as you are aware, but one of the regal full-blown roses. She is to marry Digby Kemp, one of the many-times millionaires."

"She has been here two months or more. It cannot be a very ardent courtship."

"Oh, yes ; taking care of a sick cousin, who was half-killed, or something. Lovely devotion, and all that ! But the old man is tremendously hard hit, Jeffries. If she should play fast and loose with him it would nearly kill the poor fellow. I'll tell you, in confidence, how I come to know so much. Our firm does his legal business. He has been making some magnificent settlements on her, and has his will drafted, ready to sign on the wedding-day, or the night before, maybe. There are no near heirs who really need anything, so the old fellow can do it with a clear conscience. Why, I'm lucky to have a sight of her."

"The cousin will be here, too ; she has quite recovered. No bones were broken. It just missed being very serious. The young girl's mother is one of those nice, honest, sensible women who are born ladies. They have lived here some three or four years."

"I'll be glad to stay, Jeffries. I doubt if I shall ever get so near to regal magnificence again."

Boyd Jeffries went for them himself. It was a beautiful day, and the drive brought a wild-rose tint to Doris Norwood's cheeks and gave her a strange beauty.

Afterwards they rambled through the house and unearthed old curiosities, as well as modern treasures.

It was at the dinner that Jeffries first noted a ring on Valerie's finger. It was a small but fine diamond in an old-fashioned setting. It seemed rather odd to him. And at last the fortune she had been seeking all her life had come to her. What if he had cared for her all these years, and met her thus to lay his heart in the dust at her feet ? She would walk over it with her royal smile. Ah, well for him the old love was dead beyond recall, gone to dust and ashes—the love that had so nearly made a wreck of him.

It was a gay little dinner. Spencer was a rising young lawyer, and at his very best. The table was like a picture. Valerie Blanchard was a magnificent woman, but to-night Jeffries liked best the simple, honest little girl who had as yet kept, unspoilt, from the great world.

They had some music later on ; they strolled about, and Spencer took Doris off to explain a ghost chamber to her. Mrs. Norwood was busy with some engravings. Valerie sauntered out to the small conservatory with its glass dome, through which the stars looked down, and a small crescent of yellowish moon.

She held out her hand suddenly to Jeffries, and the long ray of the diamond flashed in his eyes.

"It is your ring," she said under her breath. "I have kept it all these years."

Jeffries started, and his breath for a moment left him. He seemed groping for possession of himself.

"All these years," she said proudly.

"It was folly." His voice was low and husky.

"A woman's folly, then. Men are sensible, and forget." She looked at him with dark, glittering eyes. "And sometimes they are merciful and forgive."

"You do not mean—you cannot mean—— "

She stood there proudly. He should interpret himself.

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He thought of the man loving her now, and having the utmost faith in her. He did not love her. He had no faith in her.

"That past is dead and done with," he made protest. "Do not recall it."

"You loved me then." She raised her seductive eyes; her scarlet lip quivered.

"Yes, I loved then. But you——"

"I preached patience," she interrupted. "If you had been willing to wait——"

"And deceive the man who loved me as only the best of fathers can love? No, I could not do that. He said, 'Tell this woman you are poor, with only your health and your energy to offer her, and she will reject you.' You did not quite reject me. You played with me, like the coquette you were. Perhaps you believed he might relent."

"Good Heavens! I loved you! Did I not offer to wait until you could take me?"

"And let him believe it was broken off! Take his love and his money and wait for him to die or something! No. I was too honest for that. I kept my faith in you and quarrelled with him, headstrong fool that I was. And then—you did not quite throw me over, but you gave me that three years' probation abroad, with no engagement, no promise of letters to live upon. And meanwhile you accepted Ralph Fessenden."

She turned pale at that.

"He pleaded so; I felt I had no right——"

"You might have recalled me if you were so conscientious. He lost his fortune, and you threw him over."

"No, it was not altogether that. There were other reasons. He went the swift road to destruction—there was a talk of his unsteadiness before. Why should I have ruined my own life——"

"Why hold out hopes at first? He died almost in the arms of a friend of mine, indebted to him for shelter, for decent burial. I will not tell you his dying words. Then my heart began to yearn for the other love I had thrown aside for you. I was a coward, and ashamed to ask for it. But he came to me in his great love and kindness——"

"And bound you never to forgive me?" she interrupted, passionately.

"No, I am quite free. He made no conditions. I took back my son's place thankfully, glad to make some amends for my wrong-headedness. Thank God for that comfort and pleasure!"

"It might all have been so different with you, and with me, if you had listened to reason. I, too, was young, and not over wise. And in my anger I did try to put others in your place. I never succeeded. Boyd, think of me with a little pity, a little tenderness. If you have been forgiven for what you did in anger and impatience, think how divine a thing forgiveness is, and be merciful."

She bowed her head towards him. She stretched out her hands. He had only to clasp her to his heart, and the old flood of love might return. Then he remembered the other man who was buying her.

"I forgive you," he said coldly. "But the old love is dead. Let it go with the past. If I were a richer man my money might make amends for the ghost I should bring to the feast. As it is——"

She looked at him for a moment as if she could kill him where he stood, if a deadly glance could kill. All this she had done for love of him! Was it love? If he had not proved his uncle's heir, he might have gone his way. Yet she hated to think of another woman rekindling the flame that she could not.

"Here is your ring," she said mockingly. "Doris Norwood has a plump finger; it may fit her."

He took it, and throwing it on the ground, crushed it under his heel.

Spencer and Doris entered from the hall, laughing, yet Doris looked a little pale and tired, but very sweet. What if he made that part of Valerie's prediction true? Was she not the sort of woman to make him happy?

"We must go home," said Mrs. Norwood. "It is late for you to be up, my child."

They all expressed their delight and satisfaction; but the drive home was strangely silent. Valerie went directly to her room. Her desperate venture had been of no avail. He had penetrated her inmost soul, and now she hated him.

Nearly noon of the next day a carriage drove up, and an elderly man alighted. From her window Valerie saw and recognised him. She had been packing, but she slipped into her prettiest gown, and sped downstairs, where he was awaiting her in the drawing-room.

"Forgive my impatience. I could not stay away." His voice was tremulous, his eyes eager. "I heard——"

"Did you hear I had stumbled over an old lover here?" in her silvery, half-teasing voice. "Well, that is true. When he was young and poor I fancied myself in love with him. Now he is older, richer, and I have seen him every day for three weeks. Do I look as if I meant to break your heart?" She held out both hands, and smiled beguilingly. "Did you bring me a ring?"

"The ring you would not wear before!" He began to fumble in his pocket.

"You may put it on now. There, you may take me home. Then—you may fix the wedding-day, and I promise the ghost of no old lover shall appear at the feast."

He clasped her in his arms in a transport of bliss.

Just before she left she sank a parting shaft into Mrs. Norwood's very soul. A month later she was Mrs. Digby Kemp, and on her way to Paris.

Boyd Jeffries felt the indescribable change in the pleasant friendship of the past month. He let it go for awhile until he had quite resolved upon the future. Then he spent an evening with Mrs. Norwood.

"Confess," he said, "that your coldness is due to a warning of Miss Blanchard's. You have heard her story, now hear mine, and judge between us. Then let me prove myself worthy of your friendship."

She was a good deal surprised and shocked at Valerie's duplicity. Or was it the desperation of love?

"She is very fascinating when she chooses, but I am thankful our ways lie apart," the elder woman said, gravely.

"She is better fitted for the life she has chosen," was the rejoinder.

Valerie Kemp was still abroad when she heard of Jeffries' marriage. She ground her heel in the soft rug as if she were gladly crushing the life out of something.

But the picture of Doris by the cheerful fire at Old Place, with her husband smiling down in her face, was the ghost at her feast.

Aubrey Leigh.

THE TERRIBLE Q.

Captain Kettle—you remember his adventures in *Pearson's Magazine*—was an unpleasant person to meet if he wasn't in a good temper. But he was a perfect angel when compared with Don Q. This gentleman is a Spanish brigand, punctiliously polite, and consistently courteous: at the same time, he will gladly torture his captives to death if the fancy strikes him; or throw them over 500-foot precipices as an after-dinner amusement. He is like a vulture in appearance, and like a vulture, too, in rapacity. At the same time he can sometimes show the utmost unselfishness and chivalry. He's really a character worth knowing—so read his adventures—written by K. & Hesketh Prichard—in Pearson's Magazine.

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- THE -
REVENGE OF BARBARA WALKER.

Telling of the Fearful Consequences of a Great Wrong.

Containing the incident depicted on the cover.

BARBARA WALKER, blooming with all the freshness of eighteen summers, sat curled up in the bay-window watching for the postman; her eyes were full of dreams, her mouth smiling, the whole picture suggestive of youth and happiness.

Half an hour later the picture was changed. A woman sat there, rigid, stricken with sudden age; the eyes were filled with a great despair, the mouth hopeless in its painful compression. Yet Barbara Walker had not exchanged her seat with anyone; the change had come to her, swift, sudden, and appalling.

The postman had given a letter into the outstretched hands of the young girl in the morning of light and love. The letter was opened and read, it fell from the nerveless hand of a woman matured by sudden and awful horror. Only another man faithless, another life blighted. Only the old story.

"DEAR FRIEND BARBARA," the letter began. Oh, Heavens! how like the keen cut of a sword that word *friend* goes to the heart when it takes the place of another dearer word.

"DEAR FRIEND BARBARA,—*I fear that you will be somewhat surprised and pained at what I feel compelled to write you. For many weeks I have been conscious of a growing change in my sentiments towards you. What I thought was love was only fancy—the result of association. Knowing this, I could never make you happy as my wife. Therefore, I trust you will give me my freedom, as I give you yours, and always think of me as your friend.* "HOWARD SNOW."

So the beautiful dream of a year that had filled a young life with the golden glory of a June sunrise was quenched in the blackness of a starless night.

Do you know what it is to see a great hope die? To have the happiness that makes all of life for you crushed with one blow from the hand of Fate? Do you know what it is to drop from noonday heights of joy to the depths of the darkest midnight? If you do, I need not try to tell you of the days and weeks that followed for Barbara Walker. If you do not, it would be useless for me to try; for only through experience, or close companionship with an awful sorrow, are we enabled to comprehend it.

And while she sat in the shadows, struggling with her stricken young heart, that knew not how to entertain the stranger, Pain, striving vainly to pierce the impenetrable gloom that shrouded her, a hundred miles away Howard Snow basked in the sunlight of another woman's smile.

He was not a cruel or a heartless man. But his better impulses, his sympathies, his regard for the feelings of others were all lost in an infatuation for another beautiful daughter of Eve.

Howard Snow was only twenty-three, and Helen Thomas was thirty; one of those women who ripen like a peach in the sun, and to whom mature years add only richer charms.

Rightly directed, her life might have been of rare usefulness and power, for she possessed that strong magnetic charm that sways the world.

But she used it only to draw men to her feet.

Howard Snow was the only desirable young man in the little village where she chanced to be spending a few months with a relative.

"He has the face of a Greek god," she said, "but it needs strong emotion to perfect it."

"He is engaged to a lovely girl, a fresh wild-rose of womanhood, who visited here last summer," said her relative.

"Is that so?" responded Helen, as she dropped her lashes. But she was most cordial and alluring when she next met Howard Snow.

It was an easy conquest. He was unused to women like Helen Thomas, and he did not know himself. She played upon the slumbering passions of his nature, and set his blood on fire by the soft touches of her caressing hands and the languor of her glances.

It was the old story of a young man's infatuation for a woman older than himself. It blinded his judgment and blunted his sense of right and wrong, and made him conscious of but one desire in life—to be free and under no obligations to any woman but his Helen. His bonds to Barbara Walker grew hateful, and she seemed to him a child, whose weakness would be a drag upon him always.

So he freed himself, and for a time was happy. Then his better nature awoke with a sudden shock. He spoke of marriage to Helen Thomas, and she laughed in his face.

"Marriage!" she said. "Why, you are only a boy! How can you think of so absurd a thing?"

And her laughter had the ring of scorn in it.

"A boy?" he answered. "Yes, I *was* a boy when I met you, and you were not content to let me remain so. You played upon me by every art in your power till you woke up the *man* in me. Now it demands its own, and you laugh at me. I did not know before that a woman could do a thing like this and not die of shame if she knew it.

"You have lessened my estimate of the sex, Miss Thomas, and no woman can do a crueller or baser thing than that. The upward growth and glory of the world depend upon man's estimate of woman. And you have lowered her standard in my sight. May God forgive you!"

Then he went his way, with a face that bore the marks of the "strong emotions" which Helen Thomas thought it needed to perfect it, and a heart that was bitter and cynical.

He thought of Barbara Walker with a strange tenderness, but with no idea of insulting her with any attempt at a renewal of old ties. He felt no love for her, in truth; only he felt his own baseness and lack of stability. She was to him like a child he had cruelly hurt, and he was filled with tender pity. For Helen he grew to feel only scorn. Her hold upon him had been solely physical, and when a man grows to notice that, the woman is sure to be scorned.

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He applied himself to his profession, and made a success of it. He grew rich, prosperous, popular with men, but feared by women, for his sarcasm was unsparing and his wit always two-edged. Yet marriageable women sought after him, for he had personal attractions, added to his wealth and influence, and seemed a desirable husband for an ambitious woman.

But he reached the age of thirty-five and was still free. And then he met Barbara Walker again.

Through all these years he had lost trace of her, and had heard nothing of her.

Now they met suddenly, and to him, at least, unexpectedly, at a formal dinner party, given by a prominent politician.

Howard Snow was presented to Miss Walker by the hostess, and requested to lead her into dinner. It was Barbara Walker! There was no mistaking the face and form he so well remembered, and yet what a change!

The nine years had but perfected the girlish graces that were pleasing of old, and lent the charm of dignity and elegance to what was once only sweetness and simplicity. The shy, modest manner had given place to a perfect self-possession, and rare conversational powers rendered her the star of the evening.

"It is a long time since we last met, Mr. Snow," she said, as they went to dinner. "I am pleased to know of the success and prosperity that have attended you during these years."

How quietly she spoke of their last meeting. He wondered if she remembered the parting—a lover's parting!

"I had lost all trace of you," he answered, "but am glad to find, as I do, that you have been well and happy. Your face denotes both. Where are your parents?"

"In Heaven I trust!" she said, softly. "They died eight years ago, and left me all alone. I had an uncle in America, and went to him, and have spent most of my time in travel since. A few months ago a longing seized upon me to see my own land and my old home again, so I came back."

Howard Snow scarcely left her side all the evening. She charmed him with her descriptions of scenery and chit-chat of foreign life.

"I would be glad to call," he said, as they parted. "Where can I find you?"

"In the house where we first met," she said, glancing up at him, with the old, shy look. "I am visiting the same friends."

He could not have described his sensations as he rang the bell the next day, and was ushered into the presence of that woman who was once his betrothed wife. Admiration, reverence, respect, and, it seemed to him, *love*, stirred together in his heart.

It was only one of many calls. She was so kind, so cordial, so entertaining. Her soul was too large to treasure any resentment against him for that old wrong.

Then by-and-by he grew to realise how he was loving this woman. Not the old love awakened, but a new love created—the one grand passion of his life.

Mentally, morally, and physically this woman ministered to him; her conversation charmed him, her moral atmosphere elevated him, and the touch of her hand electrified him. Surely a love like this was from Heaven, and must meet with some response. Still he hesitated, not daring to speak. But so strong grew the emotion, it overpowered him at length.

"God knows I feel my unworthiness," he said, "but I love you, Barbara, and I want you for my wife. I said the same words to you years ago, and failed you. I was only a weak boy then, swayed about by a designing woman. Now I am a man, knowing my own heart, and with all its intense, pent-up passion it cries out for you."

For a moment Barbara's face seemed glorified with light. Her cheeks glowed, her eyes enlarged, her breast heaved. She put both hands in his.

"I have never been content without you—not for one moment," she said. "Nothing filled my life so full that I did not feel the need of you, Harold."

Their marriage was arranged for three months later. She lingered until the last month, seemingly unwilling to separate from him, and then went back to her old home. It was occupied by tenants, but she wanted to make her preparations there, she said, as she had dreamt of doing so long ago.

And they were to be married in the village church by the old family rector.

"Let the old dream reach perfection in every detail at last," she said.

The little church was crowded when the day came. All in a sheen of white, Barbara stood before the altar, and felt her hand taken by the man who had discarded her years before.

"Wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded husband?"

The old rector waited for the response. It came like the report of a pistol.

"*Never!* As he once rejected me, so now do I reject him!"

And she swept down the aisle, whiter than her robes, and left a gasping crowd of astonished people staring blankly after her.

Very calmly and very coldly Howard Snow passed down and out of the church. He went to the hotel where his luggage was left, and began to make preparations for departure by an early train. But his hands seemed paralysed, and strange lights danced before his eyes.

Before midnight he was in a raving delirium. The next morning they found him in a high fever, calling wildly on the name of Barbara, and reviling some woman he called Helen, who seemed pursuing him.

"He cannot live," the doctor said the next evening. "Will someone go and ask the woman who has done this cruel deed to come here for a moment? The sight of her may quiet him, perhaps."

But while he spoke she came in, her bridal white exchanged for funeral black, her long hair falling loose about her.

She glided to the bedside and put her hands on his face.

"Howard!" she called, in a trembling voice; "oh, my love, Howard, forgive me before you die."

But he fancied she was the woman Helen, and shrieked and grew so violent that they sent her from the room.

There was a week of wild delirium, and then a week of stupor, and then, like a pale wraith of her former self, she came slowly in and knelt beside him.

She put her wasted cheek beside his on the pillow, and the tears that had refused to flow fell slowly down, as she said:

"Oh, I thought revenge was sweet, but it is bitter, bitter, my love."

How long she knelt there she did not know, but suddenly she was startled by a sigh—a very ghost of a sigh, it seemed to her. She put her hand over the heart she had believed still for ever. It fluttered feebly.

"Oh, thank Heaven!" she cried, and fell unconscious.

An hour later she found herself in bed, and kindly cared for, and smiling faces all about her.

"He lives," they said. "Your touch brought him from the very gates of death."

A few weeks later a pallid bride, and a still more pallid groom, passed down the old church aisle, and out into the great world.

Somewhere they dwell to-day—happy, let us hope, since they had both so suffered in the past.

Stanley Hammond.

WHAT HANDWRITING WILL TELL.

It can tell you what sort of a person you are as regards disposition and many other points that it is as well to know. If you wish for this information, send a specimen of your handwriting, together with six penny stamps and a stamped addressed envelope, to Ranfe, 32 Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. You will receive in return an accurate delineation of your character, which will tell you what you wish to know.

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Splendid Series.

A Striking Series of Astonishing Revelations.

Told by the Decoy Herself.

OF WHOM YOU READ.

Vivienne D'Alton, the decoy. She, an innocent girl, unwittingly leads young gentlemen of good social standing to their ruin at the hands of her father.

Beverley D'Alton, who poses as a millionaire who has made his money by judicious speculation. He assumes to lavish great affection on his daughter, from whom he has been separated for many years.

Mrs. Sherwood. A florid person, who is introduced to Vivienne by her father as a great friend of her dead mother. She lives with the D'Altons, and requests Vivienne to call her "Aunt Flora," which the young girl reluctantly does.

Annchen. A lady's maid, whom Vivienne greatly detests. She seems to be on very familiar terms with Mrs. Sherwood and Mr. D'Alton.

SEVENTH EPISODE.

Mr. D'Alton Prevents Unpleasantness.

I used to have an idea, shared by a great section of humanity, that money was the cure of all evil. Nowadays my opinion is considerably modified, for I have seen for myself that, though wealth may mitigate many evils, it is not proof against sickness, domestic trouble, or sudden calamity, such as overtook me when poor Lady Windelmore expired before my eyes.

Of course there was any amount of help forthcoming immediately, but the end had come almost like lightning, and nobody considered that we could have done anything to postpone it.

My tears fell fast and copiously, for Lady Windelmore had already won my love, and for a time it was difficult to believe that she was really dead.

"She was quite well an hour ago," I sobbed. "She cannot be dead!"

My father's face wore the look of a man who is struggling with sudden grief, and even Aunt Flora, who was always jealous of her ladyship's presence in the house, was pale with the shock she had received. Her voice was very gentle, too, as she strove to convince me of the reality of my bereavement.

"My poor, dear child!" she murmured. "It is a terrible affair to have happened. But it's no use encouraging you to believe anything but the truth. Nothing on earth could ever bring the unfortunate lady back to life. But if she would only have heeded me, she might still have been alive and well, though of course I hardly expected her to take advice from me."

"And," added my father, virtually addressing himself to the two other doctors, who had just pronounced life to be quite extinct, "I feared this when I noticed how vigorously her ladyship attacked her lunch to-day."

"What do you mean?" was my sharp interjection. "How could advice from Aunt Flora have saved Lady Windelmore? And how could you tell that there was anything wrong with her at lunch? I'm sure she seemed to enjoy the meal heartily."

My father turned his eyes up to the ceiling; Mrs. Sherwood groaned aloud, and the two doctors looked significantly at each other.

"Yes, that's the crux of the mischief," said my father. "I never saw so small a person eat so much."

"Enormous!" added Aunt Flora. "It was an enormous meal."

I was about to protest that Lady Windelmore had eaten far less at lunch than the rest of us, when Dr. Spondan hastily observed, "Yes, Mr. D'Alton, it is only too evident that the poor lady died from syncope, brought on by eating too hearty a meal. What do you say, Dr. Arnold?"

"I agree with you *in toto*," was Dr. Arnold's response.

"Wouldn't it be more charitable to indorse Dr. Marshall's opinion that she suffered from unsuspected disease of the heart?" remonstrated my father in his gentlest manner. "You see, the unfortunate lady has relatives who would be needlessly pained by the bare, brutal truth."

"Exactly! I see no reason why we should be unnecessarily precise," agreed Dr. Arnold, and Dr. Spondan also nodded acquiescence.

"Of course," continued my father, "if you two gentlemen think there should be a *post mortem*, I must agree to it, though naturally such a course will be very painful to all concerned. However, I am willing to take your advice, irrespective of personal feeling, and, in addition to the cheque for a hundred pounds, which I hope Dr. Marshall and each of you will accept in payment for the trouble already incurred, I shall insist upon defraying any expense connected with the inquest."

"An inquest!" exclaimed Aunt Flora. "Why, it would ruin Vivienne's season!"

The idea horrified me also, but not from a selfish point of view. I was thinking of how Lady Windelmore herself would have endured anything rather than be the centre of notoriety. And, these being her principles when she was alive, why should they be violated when she could no longer help herself?

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Greatly to my relief the doctors seemed to take this view also. They were firmly convinced that there could be no doubt as to the cause of death, and the ultimate outcome of the sad affair was what we all hoped for.

The body was reverently removed to another room, to await the ministrations of the undertakers and their assistants. Then the doctors, each a hundred pounds richer, left the house, after certifying syncope to have been the cause of death, and the unpleasant prospect of an inquest no longer stared us in the face.

Nobody could have been more generous than my father. And nobody could have been more courteous to the relatives of the deceased lady than he was. Their rank was all that could be desired, but their income was totally inadequate for their position, and they were very favourably impressed by the tactful manner in which Mr. D'Alton relieved them of all pecuniary outlay in connection with the dowager's sudden demise.

They were also thankful to be spared the pain of an inquest, but there came a time when they must have wished they had had not been quite so ready to believe all that was told them.

It was so with me. But, meanwhile, I was still free from the dreadful suspicion which gradually forced itself upon my notice, and life seemed to move so swiftly that there was little time to bestow upon individual griefs. No sooner had my late chaperon's relatives removed the remains for interment, than my father and Aunt Flora seemed to think that I would suffer mental and physical harm if I were not kept constantly amused.

It had not been a *family* bereavement for us, so it was only considered necessary to make limited concessions to conventional restraint, and though one or two big receptions were postponed, my father insisted that I should be the centre of a constantly coming and going crowd of visitors.

Some of these alluded to the mysterious fate which had overtaken Mr. O'Connell, for the case had made a great sensation, and Scotland Yard was very keen in working up fresh clues. But nothing seemed to come of them, although my father himself went to Scotland Yard and gave all the information he could.

Somehow, I could never bring myself to talk of the tragedy at all, for I was haunted by a strange uneasiness whenever I thought of it. The sleepy, helpless face seemed to reproach me for having stood idly by while the dastardly cabman drove away, and time and again I tried to think what my father meant when he said, "Lose no time! You'll find all serene at the office."

And time after time I wondered if the police had traced any of the jewellery which I knew Mr. O'Connell to possess. Certainly he may have taken it to his rooms before he came on to our house. But I had persistent doubts on the subject, and could not help thinking that the diamonds were the direct cause of his death.

However, there was no mention of them in connection with the case, and Lady Windelmore, the only person besides myself who could have guessed the probably intended destination of the costly parure, was no longer able to give me her advice as to whether or not I ought to mention my knowledge.

"And after all," I thought eventually, "I do not suppose that I could do anything but harm by appearing to be familiar with Mr. O'Connell's movements and possessions. As for that speech to the cabman—well, I was excited and nervous, so I very likely misunderstood what I heard."

This solution of the worry helped to raise my spirits considerably, until a visit from Sophie Melrose made me wonder if Fate intended me to be always pursued by the shadow of tragedy.

* * * * *

Miss Melrose looked the picture of distress and burst into tears as soon as she saw me.

"I suppose you have heard of our trouble?" she asked, and, without giving me time to reply, she continued: "It is the most terrible thing, and the doctors say that it may last indefinitely, unless we can do something to rouse him."

Sobs made some of Sophie's words almost indistinct, but there was no mistaking the fact that she was in great grief, and I felt glad that there was nobody likely to interrupt our conversation before the poor girl had opened her heart to me fully.

My father never seemed to turn a deaf ear to applications for charity. But he was hardly a congenial recipient of a girl's confidences, and I thought it just as well that he was not at home just now.

Aunt Flora was indulging in a nap in her own room, so we were spared her flagrant insincerities, and I was able to devote myself entirely to the task of soothing my excited visitor.

"Now, dear, if you will tell me what has happened," I said, putting my arms comfortingly round her, and pillowing her head on my shoulder—"if you will tell me what has happened I shall know better what to say to you in return. At present I am quite in the dark."

"It is Alan," was the sorrowful answer. "He went out one afternoon last week, saying that he would probably dine with his old schoolfriend, Seymour Phillips, and that we were not to be surprised if he spent the night at his chambers. Knowing that they had only just discovered their mutual presence in London, we thought it quite natural that they should want to see a great deal of each other, and never worried until forty-eight hours passed away without any message from Alan. Then Mr. Phillips called at our house and it transpired that my brother had never gone to dine with him, as he had promised to do. Of course this put us all in a great state, and we communicated with the police at once, for we were afraid of foul play. But it was two days later before we discovered the poor boy's whereabouts. He was found wandering on Clapham Common in a most distressing state of mental collapse. He was hungry, weary and penniless. His memory was an absolute blank. He could recollect nobody nor anything, and it was only by comparing him with the description we had given of him to the police that his identity was discovered.

"We have him under a skilled brain specialist, who says that some terrible shock must have made his mind a blank, and the fact that not a card, or letter, or anything of value was left on him seems to prove that he has been in the hands of thieves. Oh, Miss D'Alton, if you could but see what a pitiful state my brother has been brought to, your heart would ache for him!"

My heart already ached for both Alan and his sisters, and I eagerly questioned Sophie concerning the strange calamity that had befallen them.

"Mr. Phillips is very good," she continued. "He immediately did his best to become acquainted with Alan's business affairs, so that they would not suffer while he was away. But, to all our amazement, it turns out that they could not be much worse. He has actually realised most of the fortune lately bequeathed to him, and no less than eighty thousand pounds seems to be missing. There is not the slightest clue to what has become of it, and the poor boy himself can tell us nothing concerning it. He does not recognise a single one of us. In fact, he doesn't even remember his own name!"

Sophie Melrose was evidently almost distracted. But her feelings were nothing to mine, for one awful dread was thrusting itself upon my notice. How was it that I seemed to be indirectly connected with a sequence of tragedies, concerning each one of which I possessed some knowledge which I

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dared not communicate ? And how was it that my thoughts at once flew to my father, as the one man who might be able to elucidate the mystery of the lost fortune.

Did I not hear young Alan tell him that he had realised all he could, and that he was prepared to immediately invest £80,000 in the New Barbary Land Development Co. ? Did I not hear him implore to be allowed to place it in my father's hands ? And did I not hear the latter consent to waive his own preferential rights in favour of Alan ?

" I shall go mad if I let my thoughts run that way ! " was my mental exclamation. " It is merely a coincidence, and very likely this happened some days after the interview I overheard."

" Tell me," I urged, and Sophie looked quite thankful when she saw how desperately interested I was in her story, " when did you see your brother last ? "

" It was Tuesday week, about three o'clock. He had been out all morning, on business, so he said, and was as bright while we were having luncheon as ever he was. There was nothing to indicate trouble of any sort."

Tuesday week ! That was the day he had the conversation with my father, and, if I dared but do so, I could tell Sophie that I had seen her brother two hours later than she did !

I was in a whirl of doubt and amazement, but my agitation was accepted as nothing more than the outcome of pity, and Sophie kissed me warmly as she whispered: " Vivienne, we centre all our hopes on you ! The specialist says that if we can suddenly confront Alan with someone he loves, he may instantly regain his lost memory, and then he will be able o explain all that is troubling us."

" Yes, I will come," was my answer. " And I pray that good may result from the visit. Annchen ! What are you doing here ? How dare you intrude without knocking ? "

How long Annchen had been in the room, I could not tell, for she had entered noiselessly, and stood within the doorway.

" Please, miss," she replied, without the slightest departure from her usual impassive manner, " I had just come in. I did knock, and thought you would have heard me."

" And now that you are here, what do you want ? "

" Please, miss, the master sent me to say that he would like you to come into the drawing-room. Mr. and Miss Greatham are there, and have inquired for you."

" Tell them that I am very sorry, but that I am unable to see anyone else just now. I am going out with Miss Melrose."

" Yes, miss," answered Annchen. Then she hastened off with her message. But before I could make my departure good, my father came to protest against my going out just then.

" My dear girl," he began, " I hope you do not mean to leave me to entertain your visitors ? Ah ! how do you do, Miss Melrose ? How is it that we have seen nothing of you for several days ? "

" Father," I hastily interposed, wishing to spare Sophie the pain of telling her story all over again, " Miss Melrose wants me to go home with her on a rather important errand."

" I'm very sorry, my dear, but I'm sure she will excuse you when I say that it is more important for you to remain at home this afternoon."

My father spoke as suavely as usual, but there was a determined gleam in his eye, and a firm set of his mouth, which gave me fully to understand that he did not intend to allow me my usual freedom, and I was very glad when Sophie interposed with the words :

" I should be very sorry to inconvenience you, Mr. D'Alton, and as you do not appear to be able to spare Vivienne just now, will you let her come to us to-morrow morning ? "

" With all my heart ! " was the prompt response. " Make whatever arrangements you like with each other, and a carriage shall be at your disposal. I suppose you really want to do a bit of shopping together. Ah, well, girls will be girls, and if they have money to spend, then let them spend it, say I."

We seemed to have no time to rectify my father's mistake, ere we were left alone with a final injunction for me to proceed to the drawing-room as quickly as I could. So Sophie departed immediately, and I, anything but pleased at being compelled to remain indoors, went to see what was the wonderful occasion that demanded my presence.

Claude Greatham welcomed me with a beaming smile, and Clarissa nodded pleasantly to me. Aunt Flora was in evidence, wearing a tea-gown of fearful colour and wonderful make. And my father was making himself agreeable.

" That's right, dear ! " he ejaculated as I entered the room. " We want you to preside at the tea-tray. Your aunt has hurt her wrist, so cannot touch the teapot. And, in any case, when I do happen to be at home in the afternoon, I like to receive my tea from you."

So that was all ! Fancy considering afternoon tea of more importance than helping to do an inestimable service to somebody else ! Worse still, fancy having to let Sophie go away without a cup of tea ! No wonder I felt vexed, but of course the Greathams couldn't help it, so I did not allow my vexation to show on the surface.

But though I tried my best to keep the ball of conversation rolling, without appearing to notice Claude Greatham's fast increasing infatuation for me, it soon became all too evident that he was falling deeper in love every minute, and that he only waited his opportunity to ask me to marry him.

Now Claude Greatham was a nice young fellow. But I knew that I could never feel anything warmer than friendship for him, so I was in one sense relieved when Clarissa, whose fortune equalled her brother's, broached the subject of investments, which nobody seemed able to resist doing after they had spent some time in my father's company.

As usual, he was kindness itself, but I did not quite hear the outcome of what was going to be done with a large sum of money which Clarissa Greatham wanted to place at better interest than she was already getting, for Mrs. Sherwood suddenly complained of faintness, and I was so frightened, remembering what had happened to Lady Windelmore, that I fell in with my father's suggestion that I should go at once with Aunt Flora to her own room.

Happily, the faintness did not last long. Indeed, I couldn't help wondering if it had been real or assumed, for there was no change of colour observable, such as generally accompanies an attack of the kind complained of. It also struck me as more than odd that my father, after compelling me to go into the drawing-room against my wish, should have dismissed me again without giving me the chance of being decently civil to the guests of whom he made such a fuss awhile ago.

One more thing occurred to me. I was evidently growing horribly suspicious, for I seemed to scent a deep motive in almost every trivial little detail that happened, and I was just reproaching myself to this effect when my doubts were reawakened with full vigour.

" You can go now, dear," said Aunt Flora, who was now lying down on a big Chesterfield in her sitting-room. " I don't think I shall come downstairs again, but there is no need to feel uneasy, Annchen will let you know if I have a relapse."

I was not sorry to receive my dismissal, although my pride was very much in arms at the idea of being spoken patronisingly to by Mrs. Sherwood, and I made no pretence of wanting to remain with her.

But I was altogether in a miserable humour, and was walking moodily out of Mrs. Sherwood's suite of rooms, when I espied a red-backed, morrocco-bound book which partially projected from behind a cushion on an armchair I had to pass.

Obeying an idle impulse, I thought I would see if the book would suffice to amuse me till it was time to dress for dinner, and, without being seen by Mrs. Sherwood, I quietly took it to my own room.

But my face turned cold with a strange dread when I saw what kind of a book it was that Mrs. Sherwood must have been studying diligently, for there were numerous pencilled notes in it, and it was impossible to avoid putting a sinister construction upon the ardent study of a book called " The Lives and Methods of Lucrezia Borgia and the Marchioness of Brinvilliers."

(Another instalment of this exciting series next week.)

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A Double Flirtation.

How a Girl was Foiled with her Own Weapon.

"WHAT! Going to leave a week before your time? What is the meaning of this hasty departure, Dick? Bert is coming this evening, you know, and I thought you were both looking forward to the pleasure of having a week together. I am perplexed, and I can't imagine what he will say!"

"Don't be offended, uncle!" cried Dick Atherton penitently. "I'm very sorry to go, but—well, I simply can't stand it!" he blurted forth hotly.

Mr. John Atherton looked at his brother's son with a searching gaze; his face hardened, and he placed his hand on the young fellow's shoulder with an affectionate pressure.

"I see what it is now, Dick!" he said gravely. "What an idiot I was not to foresee the danger. It's Dorothy Haldane. That girl is a heartless——"

"Don't call her that, Uncle Jack!" pleaded his nephew. "I suppose it was all my fault. She didn't ask me to fall in love with her, and I couldn't help doing so, and if I have burnt my wings in the flame, it is my fault, or the fault of human nature!"

"Fiddlesticks!" retorted John Atherton angrily. "That girl—that woman, I ought to say!—is a coquette; she lures the men and plays with their hearts. You are not the first who has been so dealt with, but it never occurred to me that you would fall under the spell. I was blind! Well, my boy, I am sorry for you, and I blame myself; but you will go away and forget! Don't do anything rash, mind! It wears off, Dick!"

The young fellow laughed mirthlessly, and left the room in order to see about packing his things. John Atherton seated himself in a chair placed sideways to the table, so that he could lie back and rest his elbow on the table in order to support his head. His face assumed an expression of painful reflection.

John Atherton was the youngest son of a large family, all of whom were dead except the two eldest, a brother and a sister. Thus it came about that this comparatively young man of thirty-one had nephews only nine or ten years his junior. It was rather curious to hear broad-shouldered Dick Atherton call this man "uncle."

John Atherton had been living in Wyckham for three years and a half; this was really the fourth summer he had passed in the place, and each year his two nephews had spent a week or two with him. All had gone well till this particular summer.

The ordinary aspect of Wyckham had been changed during the preceding autumn, when Mr. Haldane had rented a fine house in the little town; his daughter, Dorothy, had played a great part in the life of the place, and balls, parties, and amusement of all descriptions had increased greatly. The young men of Wyckham had raved about Dorothy Haldane; some of them had suffered in the flirtations, while others had played with the fire and received no more injury than Dorothy herself. John Atherton had never mixed much in Wyckham society, so most of this information had come to him from others. He was reserved, and shunned the company of other people to an extent which gained for him the epithet of "peculiar," yet all those who came in contact with him spoke highly of him. He was cultured, good-looking, and of a generous nature.

John Atherton had invited his "boys" to stay with him as usual, and it was not till Dick announced his intention of going at once that he awoke to the real position.

"I don't think that Dick will take it to heart very much!" he murmured, after several minutes of deep reflection. "His nature is not so deep. But Bert! If that girl fascinates him, it will serve him as it did me ten years ago! His mother and I resemble each other in disposition, and Bert takes after her. Heavens! what would be the result, and what would Sis think? What shall I do?"

He rose abruptly, and paced the room in agitation that seemed strange in one usually so calm and self-contained. Presently he re-seated himself with an expression of weariness.

"It would be foolish to wire him not to come; besides, he is probably on his way here now. If I warn him that may have just the reverse effect to that which I desire to obtain. I must watch and——"

The sentence remained unfinished, but there was an odd light in the dark brown eyes, and an expression of determination gradually overspread his grave countenance. Some fixed purpose had formed itself in his mind, and those who understood John Atherton knew that if he made up his mind to do a thing, he would do it.

A few hours later he was shaking hands heartily with Bert Allinson, and answering his inquiries concerning the non-appearance of Dick at the railway station.

"No, Bert, he is not ill. The fact is, he went away this morning! Oh, yes, I daresay you are surprised, but—well, perhaps I was wrong to say that he isn't ill; he *is* ill in a way! But jump in, and I will tell you as I drive you home!"

John Atherton was brief in his explanation; he told Bert that his cousin had fallen in love with a young lady of the neighbourhood, whom some people regarded as a flirt, and that Dick had fancied himself rather hard hit.

"I hope and believe that he will soon get over it, Bert! It is lucky for him, in this instance, that he does not feel quite so profoundly as you and I! Such an experience would be a calamity to us, and we should be careful how we let ourselves go!"

This was an indirect warning; he would not press it further, but turned the conversation.

Alas! John Atherton perceived, three days afterwards, that he had miscalculated the powers of Miss Dorothy Haldane, and his heart felt chilled with concern for his second nephew. His fists clenched involuntarily, and he muttered: "I must stop it!"

On the following day John Atherton surprised Bert by saying that he intended to accompany him on the excursion organised by Mr. Haldane, and take part in the picnic.

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"I have not been invited formally," he remarked easily, "but that is probably because Mr. Haldane has grown tired of sending me invitations which I have declined. I fancy that I shall not be in the way!"

"I am sure you will not!" declared Bert warmly. "Why, Dor—— Miss Haldane was saying only yesterday, that it was such a pity that you were so—that you did not come out more, you know!" Bert became confused.

"That was very kind of her!" observed John Atherton gratefully. "Yes, I think I must come out of my shell more! It may do me good."

To himself he said: "So she takes a little interest in me, eh? That is because I have taken no interest in her hitherto! Well, that gives me a start, anyhow, and it helps my plans!"

"What in the name of Fortune is going to happen?" That was the question which all Wyckham asked when it became known that the recluse was coming out of his cave.

John Atherton was actually joining in the life of the town in the heartiest of fashions, and everybody agreed that Wyckham had lost something during the preceding three years and a half. Unquestionably, Atherton was an acquisition; for, although there was a certain gravity which seemed to be part of the man, he was excellent company and a perfect cavalier.

Then people began to cast knowing glances at one another and to utter enigmatic expressions; the younger men occasionally scowled, while the marriageable ladies of all ages looked disconsolate and envious. The reason for this was clear; John Atherton and Dorothy Haldane were so often together!

It was with some astonishment, not unmingled with contempt, that Bert Allinson noticed the change which came over both John Atherton and Dorothy Haldane; he could not understand why the former should so completely alter his mode of living and oust him from the place of favour with Dorothy—for that is what actually occurred; nor could he comprehend, at first, why the girl who had appeared so coy, so pleased at his attentions, should so readily transfer her smiles to his uncle.

Fortunately, he was not stabbed as yet by Cupid's dart, only just superficially scratched, and he was able to turn to other attractions very readily. Nevertheless, there was still enough influence to make him linger round the flame sufficiently to render it plain that he would approach close to it again as soon as there was an opportunity. It was this opportunity which John Atherton's new mode of life effectually prevented from arising.

It was amusing to the onlookers to witness the assiduity with which John Atherton, grave, retiring Atherton, danced attendance on Miss Haldane. She was highly gratified at this forthcoming conquest; it was a distinct triumph to have brought this recluse into the daylight, and caused him to fall a victim to her charms!

Life in the little township was more free from the conventionalities than in less sleepy places, so it was nothing out of the way for Atherton to be seen bicycling, boating or golfing, with Miss Haldane.

"Is that your nephew in the distance?" asked Dorothy lazily, as the boat glided along the sluggish river one day, a fortnight or so after Bert's arrival. Atherton was rowing easily, while she was doing all the steering that was required, which was not much. "He isn't a bad sort of a boy, is he?"

"No," returned Atherton, just as lazily. "He is not quite so impressionable as Dick, is he? You remember Dick, of course?"

A slight colour tinged her cheeks. Atherton was glancing at the figure of Bert Allinson in the distance, so Dorothy's sharp glance failed to catch his eye.

"One cannot always go by appearances, Mr. Atherton. People who are apparently reserved, are often the most impressionable!" she was goaded to retort.

"Meaning me?" he said quietly, but facing her abruptly. "It depends on the source from which the impression comes. Don't you think so, Miss Haldane?"

"Perhaps!" was the confused reply. She had not anticipated this deliberate thrust; it was not often that she was taken unawares, and she was annoyed with herself for having shown her sentiments so plainly. Yet her heart beat a trifle more rapidly!

"Perhaps?" he repeated, raising his eyebrows slightly. "I think that it must be so. Now confess. You found your darts—your charms, that is—less powerful in the case of Bert than in that of his cousin, but it does not follow that the different result is due to the different nature of the one to be impressed. I should say that the two young men were much alike in that respect."

The flush deepened on Dorothy's cheeks. She understood that he was surreptitiously quizzing her. She realised that he knew that she had coquetted with Dick and had tried the same amusement with Bert, but had failed.

Her vanity was wounded; she cast about her for some scheme of retaliation, and she resolved upon the only one left to her. She would humble this man; then, if Bert Allinson remained long enough, she would attract him once more to her side. It would be useless to throw over John Atherton now and smile upon his nephew; she had coquetted longer with this grave man than with the younger, and this would, indeed, be counted a failure! In the other affair it would be assumed that she had not considered him worth powder and shot!

"Oh, dear," she sighed, with apparent density of mind, "I am afraid I cannot follow such learned reasoning, Mr. Atherton! I always get out of my depth when I attempt to argue, and I find myself arguing against my own cause. Let us talk of something more congenial."

From that moment, Dorothy set to work to reduce Atherton to capitulation; she used every artifice to capture his heart, and, to her great joy, she found him yielding.

He was more constant than ever in his attendance, his tones were more caressing, his actions more ardent. In the intoxication of success, she cared nothing for the fact that time was flying and Bert Allinson's stay was nearly over. She did not care for that now; she had conquered the man who had chaffed her and called her unsuccessful, when she had not tried. It was not fair, and she would make him confess his injustice.

She had at first asked herself why he had said that; she had puzzled over it, but his subsequent actions had elucidated the mystery. It was the blundering artifice of a man unaccustomed to society; he had desired to know if she had really cared for others, if her heart were still free. Had she really responded to his attentions because she wished to have them, or was she playing with him in order to bring about more ardent wooing on the part of another?

Dorothy laughed joyously as this solution presented itself to her—she laughed again when certain words let fall by him had confirmed her in this opinion. She had vaguely wondered—absurd idea!—if he had tried to flirt with her for some purpose; but that was so unlike grave John Atherton.

They were cycling together to a bicycle meet some ten miles from Wyckham. It was a glorious day and the meet was to be a grand affair. The weather was exhilarating, the ride and the prospect of pleasure were exciting. Dorothy's eyes sparkled and her breast heaved; she knew from her

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experience that a proposal was the most probable thing in the world on such an occasion, and that it might come at any moment. Triumph was at hand!

The time went by, however, and no declaration came from the lips of John Atherton. The meet was a grand success, and all who took part appeared to enjoy it thoroughly, with the possible exception of the one who, in the usual course of things, would have derived the greatest pleasure from it. Dorothy Haldane grew pensive as the hours passed and wondered what had put things out of joint.

To make matters worse, Bert Allinson seemed to be having a very good time with a modest member of the party who was undoubtedly happy to be with him. There was no mistaking the meaning of the glances and whispered conversations which passed between the two. Dorothy bit her lip, and waited for her own cavalier to speak the words which she had been expecting to hear.

The homeward journey by twilight raised her drooping spirits, and she became almost hysterically gay when Atherton suggested a rest on a rustic bench in a deserted part of their route.

"This has been a pleasant day, Miss Haldane; in fact, I have spent several agreeable days lately. I am afraid that this will be the last. My nephew goes home to-morrow, and I must return to my studies. I came out of my seclusion in order to protect him from danger, but my mission is ended. I think I have kept him safe."

An icy chill struck Dorothy's heart, and she had hard work to repress a moan of pain. Her face paled, and she was glad indeed that it was too dark for Atherton to observe it.

"You mean——?" she began, the words coming almost unconsciously from her lips. She hesitated.

"We may as well be plain with one another, Miss Haldane," he replied, somewhat coldly. "I am quite sure that we understand each other. You were flirting with Bert, and I had no desire to see him suffer. With you, it is play; with him, as with most men, it is different. I thought that I could provide you with the amusement which you wanted in that direction, so I stepped into the breach and took Bert's place. He did not like it at first, and I nearly spoilt the plan by twitting you while in the boat."

"You flirted with me?" inquired Dorothy, in a hollow voice.

"Well, I suppose that is what it comes to. I did the same as yourself. We were both flirting, you and I, and we knew it; there was never any doubt in either your mind or mine concerning the fact. You will not suffer in the eyes of the public, for my return to seclusion will be regarded as evidence that I have proposed and been rejected. I do not mind. I have provided you with amusement, and I have saved Bert from a big heartache. Silly fellow! He was not capable of grasping the fact that you did not want him. Shall we mount again now?"

They continued their return journey in silence, and they parted gravely outside Mr. Haldane's residence. On reaching her own room, Dorothy threw herself on the bed with a joyless laugh.

"So that is how it feels to be flirted with and cast aside," she moaned. "I did not know that it was so hard to bear! It is a bitter lesson, but I deserved it. Only—only lately it was not a flirtation on my side. I know now that it was real." And she sobbed hysterically.

"The Haldanes gone!" ejaculated John Atherton some weeks after that bicycle meet. He had not seen Dorothy since. He sat back in the chair and looked graver than usual. "It was a lesson for her, but I wonder—— No, I cannot think so; it is altogether unlikely! I felt the effects of that playing with fire myself. Did she? I hope not, at least. I had no wish, no intention, of inflicting pain on her, although she had done it to others. No, it is only a foolish fancy of mine, so let it pass. But no more of that dangerous sport for me, not even to spare my own kith and kin!"

H. Bramley.

A Surprise for All.

The competition which will be announced in a now very early number of this paper will be one that will come as a surprise to you all. It is an absolutely new idea; nothing of the sort has ever before been published. It has nothing to do with hidden treasure, picture puzzles, or any other time-honoured subject. It is of a perfectly unique description, and will be of enthralling interest to all those (and they should be legion) who enter it. Don't think for a moment that the competition will be too abstruse for him, for the beauty of the whole idea is that everyone has an equal opportunity, whatever may be his walk in life. It will form a most fascinating, as well as instructive, occupation, for the long evenings, and the magnificent cash prizes offered will amply repay the winners for the time and trouble they have spent in complying with the details of the competition. Tell your friends about it, and get them to enter if you can. Remember that in a week or so's time full particulars of the scheme will be published in this paper.

A Curious Coincidence.

"Dora" writes me a long letter in which she says that she was very much interested in our Seventh Unsolved Love Problem, which was entitled "The Engagement of Edith Sargeant," as the case was an exact parallel to her own love experience. Edith Sargeant, it will be remembered, was in an unenviable dilemma. She had pledged herself to a Bishop whom she really did not love, because she thought the man for whom she had an affection did not return it. Afterwards this latter showed that Edith was very dear to him. What should she do?

Well, "Dora" was in a like predicament. She, however, took the course of marrying the one she loved. Her elderly *fiancé* was much hurt at first, but he very soon saw that "Dora" was very much happier with her husband than she could possibly have been with him, so, being a just man, he was glad that Dora had not married him, though it had broken his heart.

I am very pleased to hear that "Dora's" married life is such a happy one, and I thank her for telling me of her love history. May the love affairs of all my readers end in so lovely a way as Dora's has done!

The Ninth Love Problem.

The Ninth Unsolved Love Problem will probably appear in the next number, and I consider it to be one of the most interesting in the series. A guinea will be offered in connection with it as usual. I am very busy now reading the replies to the Eighth Problem, and in the number after next I hope to announce the winner.

Your Editor.

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PAT KELLY'S RING.

The Story of an Adventure that ended as it should.

It was one of those uncertain days, showery and sunny at once, which make the skies of Ireland so like the emotional faces of her daughters. A party of wanderers touring in the Emerald Isle had been deluded into giving up their trip to the lakes and other places of interest in the neighbourhood, until the weather should be more propitious, and were not in the best of humour at the delay.

The prospect of a whole day in the dull little inn at Kenmare was not cheerful, and Mr. Fielding and his maiden sister, their niece, Gladys Fenwick, and Philip Dacre, a student cousin, expressed their complaints forcibly.

"It is too bad that Phil's last day with us should be spoilt," said Mr. Fielding.

"Couldn't you stay another day, Phil, for Muckross Abbey?"

"Impossible. I must be in Dublin to-morrow, or I shall miss that examination, and I wouldn't fail in that for all the ruins on the island."

The malcontents stared out of the windows grimly as the rain began to patter down again, and took what satisfaction they could in watching the fresh-cheeked old women with bobbing white cap-frills and long blue cloaks, and little donkeys dragging big carts in the street below.

A shield, representing a golden lion crowned, hanging over the doorway, led the conversation quite naturally to the subject of heraldry.

"That is an odd seal you have upon your watch-chain, Uncle George," said Gladys. "I never noticed it before; an owl holding a lizard in its claws."

"It is a quaint device, of which I never heard the meaning; it belonged to my wife's mother."

"Fitzgerald's crest is a monkey's head," said Philip.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Miss Fielding; "crests always take their origin from a brave deed of some remote ancestor, expressed allegorically or any way one fancies. What valiant suggestion could there be in a monkey? You are trying to impose on us, Phil, but we are not so gullible as you think. Are we, Gladys?"

"I certainly should not feel proud of a monkey upon my escutcheon," said Gladys, with her lovely smile; "but I suppose my opinion in such a grave matter is worth very little."

"I wish Fitzgerald were here; he could show you a ring of his, and explain why a monkey's face figures upon it, you incredulous pair."

With this, Philip discreetly left the room.

At dinner the young gentleman began again.

"Wasn't it odd, I met Fitzgerald in the coffee-room here, half an hour ago! He is invited to a ball at Mount Edgecombe this evening and is staying here to-night. I was sorry I did not know sooner of his arrival, as I might have introduced him to you. He is a very nice fellow, and I should have liked you to know him, but it is too late now, as we all disperse to-morrow morning. I only mentioned to him casually that I was here with friends."

"A great pity," said Gladys, "I should like to know Mr. Fitzgerald."

"By the way," continued Philip, "I asked him how his crest happened to be a monkey's head."

"That was thoughtful of you."

"He said that many generations ago, one of the Fitzgeralds, an only son, was sleeping unguarded in his cradle. A fire broke out and spread with great rapidity, so that all approach to the infant was cut off by the flames. No one dared go to the rescue, until a pet monkey of one of the daughters of the house was seen at an open window of the burning building with the baby clasped in its arms. The clever beast clambered down the steep wall by means of the luxuriant ivy, and with a chuckle of delight, restored the baby unharmed to the arms of its agonised mother. Since that time Jacko has figured upon the Fitzgeralds' coat-of-arms. Deservedly too, I think."

"All honour to Jacko! I am sorry I spoke disrespectfully of him," said Miss Fielding.

"I borrowed Fitzgerald's ring to show you. It is as curious as it is valuable."

The trio peered over Philip's shoulder at the ring—a sardonyx, on which was cut in relief, with consummate skill, the crest of the Fitzgeralds—a monkey's head.

"The workmanship is wonderful," said Mr. Fielding. "Any museum would be proud of such a cameo. I almost envy the owner his treasure."

"The stone is an ugly colour," Gladys remarked, slipping the ring upon her dainty finger; "but I like the gold griffin's claws holding it in place. It is a novel idea."

"Thank you for showing it to us, Philip. Be sure you give it back safely to Mr. Fitzgerald, or he will revile our memory for ever afterwards. Such a treasure as that is not easily replaced."

Early the next morning Philip Dacre took his departure for Dublin, the remainder of the party intending to start on their excursion a few hours later.

Through the half-drawn blinds of his room at the "Kenmare Arms" Hugh Fitzgerald was the unsuspected observer of a very pleasing little scene about breakfast time. A bewitchingly pretty girl, with reddish-brown hair curling low about her forehead, and hanging far below her waist in a rich plait, sweet violet eyes, and the daintiest of figures, in a neat-fitting travelling dress, came out upon a balcony within range of Fitzgerald's windows, and began friendly overtures with a flock of pigeons in the court below.

The pigeons responded willingly enough—it would indeed be a low order of creation that would give no heed when Gladys Fenwick called—and began an eager fight for the supply of crumbs generously showered from the girl's pink-and-white fingers.

"She will have no breakfast left for herself if she feeds those cormorants at such a rate," soliloquised Fitzgerald. "Who is she, I wonder? Of all the pretty faces I saw at the ball last night, every one pales before hers. Can she be one of Dacre's party? I am sure he would have mentioned the existence of this lovely little girl if he had known her! Stupid of me not to ask who his friends were before he went."

As the pigeons devoured the last handful someone called, "Gladys, there is no time to lose!" and the girl disappeared.

Mr. Fitzgerald sauntered down to the coffee-room to glean what information he could regarding the guests at the "Kenmare Arms," but the report given him was vague and unsatisfactory.

There were races in the neighbourhood, and the hotel was full to overflowing, and the host was content if he found shelter

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for his guests, without knowing their names or destinations.

"The gentleman who went away early this morning came with Sir William Bancroft and his wife, from Tralee," said a porter, in answer to Fitzgerald's question.

"Ooh, Teddy, what are you thinking of? The young gentleman came with a grey-haired lady and two little girls."

"Young gintleman, is it? He was old as the parish priest, and came alone," said a third disdainfully.

Fitzgerald turned away in despair, and betook himself to the stables to look after the welfare of his horse, and, inquiring of a certain dignitary of that department, called Rowley, was shown into an apology for a bedroom to wait.

Rowley's bower was at one end of the stables occupied by the omnibus horses, and, in its furnishing, showed the occupant to be of very jovial tastes. An old fiddle hung upon the wall, along with highly-coloured pictures. Generous-looking beer-mugs and huge pipes were tumbled helter-skelter upon a shelf, and in one corner were a gay costume and a shabby brown wig, which had evidently figured at a masked ball.

An animated discussion began outside, and Fitzgerald, leaning through the window, gathered the facts of the case.

Patsey Kelly, the only man left to drive the jaunting-car, had been to the races, and was in such an exalted state as to be quite unfit to trust with the horse. A party of tourists had engaged the cart to go to Muckross Abbey that morning, and would be angry if anything happened, as they had been disappointed the day before by the rain.

"Who are the people?" Fitzgerald asked of the despairing landlord, who had appeared on the scene.

"A gentleman and two ladies. One of them as pretty as a picture, with a long plait of hair of the colour of the chestnut over there, and bonnie blue eyes that reminded me of my own girl's. She told me in such a friendly way about her pleasure at the prospect of seeing the Abbey, and the other sights about here, I hate to have her disappointed. Bless her heart! I would drive her there myself if it wasn't for rheumatism in my old arms. Confound that scamp Kelly! There is not another man about the place that I can send."

"If you will lend me an old coat and hat, I will drive the car myself," said Fitzgerald, coming forward. "It must be an unruly horse, indeed, that I cannot manage, and I should like the fun of the thing."

"Do you really mean it?" said the landlord, a look of intense relief lighting his face.

"Certainly, I do."

"There is an old suit of clothes my son wears fishing, hanging in Rowley's room. You are about Fred's height; if you would not scorn them, they are at your service."

Hugh Fitzgerald, an erect, handsome fair fellow of twenty-four with a look about him that proclaimed the gentleman wherever he went, vanished into Rowley's sanctum, from which he shortly reappeared completely altered.

In the shabby, ill-fitting clothes of the inn-keeper's son, his figure seemed to lose all its dignity and grace, and the wig belonging to the fancy costume, surmounted by a battered old hat, made him quite unrecognisable. He had browned his hands with some nut hulls lying in a corner, and only his neatly-fitting boots, which he hoped would pass unnoticed, betrayed the gentleman.

"Ha, ha, ha! you will do capitally," said the old inn-keeper, his fat sides shaking with laughter. "Bring my guests safe home to-night and you shall have an extra half-crown for yourself. Ha, ha, ha!"

The escapade was quite to Fitzgerald's fancy; instead of for ever losing sight of the pretty girl who had so bewitched him, he would be with her all day, even though it were only in Patsey Kelly's humble capacity; he would probably find out whither she was going, and could perhaps meet her again under circumstances more favourable for acquaintance.

As he put the fruit into Gladys' hand, three pairs of eyes lighted upon the beautiful ring on his finger.

"Stop a moment. I had better take off my ring. It might look suspicious," said Fitzgerald, tugging at his seal-ring which was rather tight.

"Kelly, make haste, you rascal! the ladies are waiting," called a peremptory voice from the door.

"Bother the ring! I can't get it off! But I have a shabby pair of gloves in my pocket which will do instead."

Five minutes later the curious, tilting jaunting car, with its seat on each side arranged so that the occupants sat back to back, with their feet propped only on a little shelf which made jumping off upon the road almost irresistible, its two wheels, one horse and seat for the driver in front, drew up with all possible dignity before the doorway of the "Kenmare Arms."

The driver, apparently a rough, good-natured, country bumpkin, with a shock of brown hair and shabby, ill-fitting clothes, made an awkward clutch at his hat as his passengers took their places—a middle-aged gentleman, a lady, to whom the same adjective might apply, and a beautiful young girl with rose-tinted cheeks, and chestnut hair in a long plait.

"Gladys, mind you don't slip off; we cannot catch you if you fall," said the elder lady, taking her place beside the gentleman, while the girl sat alone.

Fitzgerald would have given—not his eyes, for then he could not have looked at her fresh young beauty—but years of his

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life to have taken the vacant place beside her instead of being obliged to turn his back upon her and mind the horse; but he had begun his acting and he must play the part through to the end.

The young lady seemed to be a very enthusiastic admirer of Nature, and she plied the driver with questions regarding the various scenes they entered upon.

Fitzgerald was delighted that she cared to address him, and told, unblushingly, tales of his own manufacture about a region that was as new to him as to Miss Gladys herself.

"I think Gladys is losing her heart to our charioteer," said Miss Field laughingly, in German to her brother.

"The admiration is natural, I fancy; the fellow nearly drove over that donkey-cart, so intent is he on what our young *protégée* says."

Fitzgerald especially prided himself on his proficiency in the German language, and he was immensely, though rather guiltily, amused at the turn affairs had taken.

"He is very handsome, don't you think so?" asked Gladys, in the same language. "His eyes are a trifle washy-looking, but he has a good complexion and beautiful teeth. I suppose he owes his teeth to his native diet of Murphys and buttermilk."

"Murphys and buttermilk, indeed!" thought Fitzgerald, as he assailed Billy, the horse, for some imaginary viciousness, to conceal the smile that would rise to his lips.

He wondered if his honour as a gentleman demanded that he should tell his knowledge of German; but an Irish peasant speaking foreign languages fluently was too suspicious a character.

Fitzgerald would not now betray his imposture for worlds, for these travellers would naturally be indignant if they knew of the trick played upon them, and the more he saw of Gladys Fenwick, the more earnestly he wished that nothing should occur to prevent their acquaintance in the future.

From scraps of their conversation he learnt that the travellers intended to pass a few weeks at Queenstown for the sea-bathing before returning to the Continent, and he made a mental note of the hotel which they had chosen for their stay, and wondered in what way he could present himself, as the idea that these people were Philip Dacre's friends had never been cherished.

"Are you afraid of spoiling your hands, that you wear gloves this weather, Kelly?" asked Mr. Fielding with a laugh.

A guilty colour rose to Fitzgerald's cheeks, and he made some awkward reply, knowing that gloves were very unsuitable for him under the circumstances.

A turn in the road brought the walls of Muckross Abbey before them, and Fitzgerald was glad for something to direct the conversation from himself, though he regretted the interruption to his chat with his pretty companion.

They all alighted, the driver gallantly lending his arm to assist the young lady in the rather perilous descent from the car, and then Fitzgerald began, for the first time, to realise the trials of his position.

Instead of going with the others to wander about the beautiful old ruin, and speculate upon its history and antiquity, he had to stay behind to feed the horse and guard his employer's umbrellas and wraps.

To brighten his solitude the supposed Kelly was presented with two bottles of stout and a huge hunk of bread-and-cheese, which he accepted with a forced smile of thanks.

That day, to his evident satisfaction, Billy, the old excursion horse of the "Kenmare Arms," had his dinner of oats supplemented with a liberal allowance of bread-and-cheese.

After a weary hour, which a cigar failed to enliven, a ragged urchin appeared, whom Fitzgerald engaged with the promise of half-a-crown, to guard the vehicle and its contents; the gentleman then directed his steps towards the path taken by his party of tourists.

They were sitting under the famous tree, which, gnarled and aged beyond all reckoning, has still sprung up since the roof of the Abbey fell, a mute but emphatic witness of the great antiquity of the walls surrounding it, ragged, ivy-grown, and picturesque.

The travellers were partaking of sandwiches, cold fowl, and sherry, and Fitzgerald devoutly wished he could join them, instead of hanging about in the background like a shabby pickpocket.

Gladys rose first, and began gathering a nosegay of the pretty pink daisies growing in the soft turf.

"What lovely red berries those are! I wonder if I could reach them," she said, looking longingly at the rich scarlet clusters standing out bravely against the grey wall above her head.

She swung herself lightly up on a ledge of rock, but still the berries hung tantalisingly above her grasp, and she was obliged to abandon the attempt, and rejoined her friends under the tree.

Fitzgerald followed her presently with a huge handful of the coveted berries, which he had easily reached, taking off his gloves as he scrambled up the wall.

"I gathered these for the young lady, if she will accept them," he said, with a bow which was far from being the awkward gesture he intended to make.

"Thank you," said Gladys, with her goddess-like smile, "how kind of you to get them."

As Fitzgerald transferred the fruit into Gladys's hand, three pairs of eyes lighted simultaneously upon the cameo of the monkey's face worn on the pseudo-driver's finger, and Mr. Fielding, his sister, and Gladys, exchanged glances of surprise.

"That is a nice ring you wear, Kelly, where did you get it?" asked Mr. Fielding, watching the man's face narrowly.

Fitzgerald blushed with vexation at having forgotten his glove, and stammered:

"Oh, I got it as a present from my late master!"

"An odd present for a gentleman to make his servant; a five-pound note would have done you more good. Let me examine the ring a little closer. It is beautifully cut."

As soon as possible Fitzgerald withdrew from the scrutiny that was becoming awkward, but he little suspected the great cause for astonishment his companions had.

"That man is certainly a rogue," said Mr. Fielding, as soon as Fitzgerald had disappeared. "The ring he wears belongs without any doubt to Phil's friend, and this man has stolen it either last night or this morning. There is no possible question of its being the same ring."

"But, Uncle George, if he had stolen it, he surely would have hidden it, instead of wearing it so conspicuously," said Glady pleadingly.

"He couldn't get it off his finger—it was quite fast, so he wore gloves to hide it. The rascal! You both saw how he blushed when I spoke of the gloves, and asked how he came by the ring. I am sure the fellow is guilty, and we must put him under arrest. It is rather an awkward business; he has noticed our suspicions, and I am afraid he will sneak away before we arrive again at Kenmare. I have it! We will return by way of Killarney, and there, under pretence of getting a glass of wine, we can give him in charge of the police."

"It is our duty to Phil's friend to have him arrested, I suppose?"

"Unquestionably!"

"Poor fellow, perhaps he is innocent," said Gladys, a troubled look shading her lovely eyes.

Fortunately there were plenty of sign-posts, or Fitzgerald would have been hopelessly at sea when told to return by way of Killarney.

His passengers, including Gladys, were surprisingly silent and self-contained during the homeward route, a state of mind which he could only attribute to fatigue.

Arrived at the hotel in Killarney, the ladies and gentlemen descended and disappeared within doors, and directly after, to Fitzgerald's amazement, two policemen advanced, and taking him by both arms, announced that he was their prisoner.

"Confound that ring, I thought it would bring me into trouble!" he mentally ejaculated. "But how ready these strangers are to jump at a conclusion. How could they know but that Kelly the car-driver might not honestly have such a trinket?"

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It would not do to explain the ridiculous affair until the departure of Gladys and her friends, so Hugh Fitzgerald allowed himself to be ignominiously led away to prison for the theft of his own property.

As he was turning the corner, flanked by the two policemen, he heard light footsteps behind him; Gladys Fenwick darted forward, pressed something in the prisoner's hand, and flew away again, as swiftly as she had come.

Fitzgerald opened his hand and saw a bright gold sovereign lying in the palm.

"The dear little girl, she was sorry for me, and gave me this money as a consolation. Bless her kind heart!" he said, as something very like a tear dimmed his eye.

* * * * *

Six weeks later, Hugh Fitzgerald, walking with a friend on the quay at Queenstown, saw Gladys Fenwick and her aunt approaching.

To his delight his friend advanced to meet them, shaking hands cordially.

Fitzgerald was presented in due time, and the desire of his heart was gratified, his right to address Gladys was established.

She in her turn was nothing loth to having the tall, handsome Englishman for a cavalier, and they had many a pleasant stroll together on the beach.

Gladys had often noticed what seemed only an ordinary English sovereign attached to Mr. Fitzgerald's watch-chain, and one day she jokingly asked him if, in all his wanderings, he had found no rarer keepsake.

"I prize it more than anything else I own," he answered quietly.

Reversing the coin he showed Gladys engraved on the other side:

"Killarney, July 7th, 1903."

"We were there at that date! How odd we did not meet!" she exclaimed. "But why do you wear the sovereign, all the same?"

"I will tell you some time, perhaps. Not now."

* * * * *

A few days later there was great excitement among the bathers at Whitepoint. A young lady, Miss Fenwick, had ventured beyond her depth, and no one was expert enough to swim out to save her.

A gentleman walking along the beach, hearing of what had happened, sprang into the waves with a white, anxious face, and, as Gladys Fenwick knew that her strength was going and she must sink, Hugh Fitzgerald's strong arms clasped her and drew her back to life.

* * * * *

"Gladys," Hugh Fitzgerald said, one moonlit evening on the sands, "I have a confession to make, and I want to tell you the secret of the gold coin I wear. I prize it because you gave it to me."

"I gave it to you? You are surely mistaken!"

Fitzgerald led her to a seat on the sea-wall, and told how his love for her had commenced when he saw her on the balcony at Kenmare, and how, for the sake of seeing her again, he had disguised himself as a peasant.

The fate that had overtaken him he need not describe, as she saw him arrested.

"I have so wondered where I had seen your face before! It was not surprising that I could not identify you," said Gladys, in astonishment. "But how did you escape from the prison?"

"Oh, that was easy enough! As soon as I was sure you had gone, I wrote a few words in pencil on my card to the landlord at the Killarney hotel, and I was released immediately. I trusted to the people at Kenmare not betraying me, and I was not mistaken in them."

"You certainly are fond of an adventure," said Gladys.

"Can you forgive such an impostor, Gladys? Do forgive me and love me, for I want you to be my wife, darling."

"I ought to have proper pride, and order you away for ever, but you saved my life, and—I love you," said Gladys shyly.

Lucy Blake.

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A Crucial Test.

"AND you think he loves you?" "I am afraid he does. I sang to him for an hour and a half last night, and when I stopped he asked me to go on."

Would Earn His Money.

TOMMY: "Do you love my sister?" Suitor: "Why do you ask?" Tommy: "Well, she said she'd give a shilling to know, and I want that shilling."

A Narrow Escape.

"I read an account of how a girl fell over forty feet without killing herself." "Good gracious! How did she do it?" "Tried to get out of a tramcar with exactly twenty men in it."

Encouragement!

MR. RICH: "I doubt if my daughter ever gave you any encouragement!" Mr. Suitor: "Most substantial encouragement, my dear sir! She said you were *the most generous of men!*"

It was His Barber!

"OH, *do* tell me who that fine, handsome, foreign-looking gentleman is? He looked as if he remembered you, George!" "Oh, yes. I frequently saw him some time back, but *now I shave myself!*"

Cause and Effect.

MRS. BLIFFERS: "Your old friend has such a sad face. Why is it?" Mr. Bliffers: "Years ago he proposed to a very beautiful girl, and——" Mrs. Bliffers: "And she refused him?" Mr. Bliffers: "No. She married him."

Plain Language.

SHE: "He didn't succeed in convincing her of his argument after all." He: "No; he merely made her indignant." "But his explanation was clear." "Yes, but that's where he made his mistake. He told her it was as 'plain as the nose on her face.'"

Too Expensive a Luxury.

"I KNOW we are poor, dear papa," said Evelyn, nestling her head against his shoulder, "but Charles is brave and hopeful, and he says that love will make a way." "I know it will," said the old banker grimly. "It has made away with two tons of best coal and two pounds' worth of gas already this winter."

Irretrievable.

"WHY is it," he asked, "that beautiful women are always the most stupid?" "Sir," she replied, "am I to understand that you desire to cast reflections upon my mental capacity?" "Oh, no," he hurriedly returned; "I have always said that you were one of the cleverest girls I ever——" But he did not finish. Before he could do so he realised that he had said the wrong thing, and could never make it right.

Depends on Circumstances.

EDYTHE: "Don't you think that character in a young man is everything?" Ethel: "Oh, yes; if he has nothing else."

Compassionate Girl.

HE: "Then I may live upon hope until next Sunday evening?" She: "Oh, poor fellow, is it as bad as that? Here, I'll lend you enough to buy a meal."

His View.

SHE: "From a purely psychological standpoint, do you think a man can give true and enduring love to two women?" The Professor: "Only until one or the other finds it out, Miss Tompkins."

A Cautious Girl.

CLARA: "I'm not going to tell him where I want to go on a honeymoon until after we are married." Maud: "Why not?" "Because I don't want him to break off the engagement."

Revenge!

FRANK: "I've got even with James at last." Edward: "How did you do it?" Frank: "I gave his girl a pair of pretty vases, and he will be ruined in keeping them filled with flowers."

Why He was Going.

CAPTAIN SLINGER: "Yes, Miss Maud. I am going to try my hand at shooting big game! I sail next week!" The Little Sister: "I suppose you find it very hard to hit the little birds, Captain Slinger?"

Then Trouble Began.

MR. JONES: "My dear, do you know that you have one of the best voices in the world?" Mrs. Jones: "Indeed! Do you really think so?" Mr. Jones: "I certainly do; otherwise it would have been worn out long ago."

He Went Quickly.

JOHNNY DUDE: "Julia, my little cherub, when does your sister Emma return?" Julia: "I don't know." "Didn't she say anything before she went away?" "She said if you came to see her, that she'd be gone till Doomsday."

Surprising in these Days.

"THEY had one of the strangest marriages recorded for a long time." "In what respect?" "In every respect. Why, the parents on both sides were present, there was nothing sudden or secret about it, and their own clergyman performed the ceremony."

The Origin of it All.

NAOMI: "George, I believe that love brings us anguish as well as bliss." "So do I." "Did you ever experience that restlessness, that anxiety, that positive pain, that——" "Certainly, love." "And what do you think caused it all?" "Indigestion!"

Hidden Treasure.

MISS MAINCHANCE: "I suppose you've heard of my engagement to Mr. Jenks?" Miss Ascott: "Yes; and I confess I was surprised. You told me once that you wouldn't marry him for a million." Miss Mainchance: "I know, dear, but I discovered later that he had two millions."

Two Reasons for the Change.

"DARLING," said the young man, as he tenderly raised the lovely head from the place where it had rested an hour or more, got up, sat down again on the other side of the beautiful maiden, and once more drew the golden curls to his bosom, "you have no objection to a slight change of position, have you?" "No, Alfred," she murmured softly, "your heart is on this side." "Yes, my angel," responded the young man, his voice trembling with deep feeling, "and my waistcoat will now get worn alike on both sides."

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A FRIEND IN NEED.

Telling How the Unexpected Happened.

"I DON'T care, I'm happy," said Frank.

"I'm sure I don't care, I'm happy—perfectly happy. Don't see how I could be more so," said Nellie, in a hopeful tone of voice.

Neither was looking at the other. Each tried to be absorbed in a book; but certainly neither was absorbed, for on the average, during the entire afternoon, they had made remarks similar to the foregoing at least every ten minutes.

"Did you say, Nellie," continued Frank, just a trifle doubtfully, "that there was enough in the house for supper and breakfast?"

"I'm quite sure, dear," said Nellie, "that there is enough for supper, and perhaps for breakfast. But we shall not want much for breakfast. You know that you have very often said that you did not care for much breakfast, and really I can get along on nothing at all."

"I don't see what we have to worry about then, do you?"

"Indeed I do not. I think we have every reason to be perfectly happy," she answered.

"Sure of supper to-day and breakfast to-morrow. I should say we have every reason to be thankful," continued Frank.

"Yes, indeed," added Nellie. "Just think of the number of people in the world who are sure neither of supper to-day nor breakfast to-morrow. Take the case of a cannibal——"

"Just what I was thinking," broke in Frank. "He is dependent on the chance call of a missionary—surely a precarious existence."

"Oh, Frank, you are joking!" said Nellie.

"Proof that I am perfectly happy," responded Frank.

"While I am perfectly happy," said Nellie, "I do wish that the firm had not failed, and that you had not lost your position and your good salary."

"Yes, and while I am perfectly happy," said Frank, "I do wish that our parents had not objected to our marriage."

"The idea that we, who are children, both of us, of rich parents, should be left to the disagreeable expedient of pawning the few wedding presents that we received!"

"Say rather the disagreeable expedient of pawning the last wedding present that we received. Now—now—now, little wife, you are going to cry!"

"Indeed, I am not," said Nellie, struggling bravely to suppress the tears. "I think we are very lucky to have any wedding presents to pawn. In fact, I think we are very lucky indeed."

"And so do I," added Frank, "very, very lucky——" Just there he was interrupted.

There is no better time than an interruption to explain the conditions of affairs in a romance, so I will take advantage of the present one, which may be the only interruption in my story. Frank and Nellie Hayward had married against their parents' wishes. Their parents, though rich, refused to help them in any way, or even to receive them in their homes. Frank was brave and manly, and Nellie was sensible and womanly. They determined to do for themselves, and at the very outset made a solemn compact with each other that, come what might, they would consider their love for each other compensation for all the ills of life.

For a time things went very well. Frank obtained a position that enabled them to live very comfortably in a furnished flat. But, as in the life of everyone else, the time came when luck turned against them. The firm that employed Frank failed, and he was unable to get another position. The little money that they had saved up from his salary was soon exhausted. They were forced to the disagreeable expedient of pawning such things of value as they possessed, and finally they had come to the end of even that resource.

Never during all their trouble had either acknowledged to the other that they were anything but happy. The crisis, however, had just about been reached. They were in a quandary. It was a question whether they would be forgiven by their parents under any circumstances, and they were not at all willing to acknowledge that they had made a mistake. They were obstinately proud.

But there was an interruption. It was a knock at the door. Nellie rose from her seat, and Frank was about to do so, when it occurred to him that the chances were that it was a creditor, and he thought it hardly worth while to go to the door. He was rather surprised, though, when, at the invitation of his wife, the door was opened by a queer old man, who looked at each of them over the rims of his eyeglasses for a full minute before he spoke.

"Mr. and Mrs. Hayward, I believe?" he said at length.

"Yes, sir," replied Nellie. "Will you take a chair?"

"Ought to have been named Wayward, I suppose," he said, chuckling to himself, as he took the proffered chair. "I suppose my visit is rather unexpected?"

"Decidedly," said Frank, curtly.

"Well, it is the unexpected that always happens," said the old gentleman. "I was rather surprised to hear you through the door, accidentally, of course, assuring yourselves that you were very lucky and very happy, and all that sort of thing."

"May I inquire what business it is of yours, sir?" asked Frank.

"None, except that it assured me that I had found the right place," answered the old gentleman.

"And what place were you looking for?" asked Frank.

"The house of a happy married couple," said the old gentleman.

"You have found it," said Frank and Nellie together.

"Ah," said the old gentleman. "It is quite a curiosity. I suppose you will pardon an old gentleman like myself, if he asks a few questions. I am a student of human nature, you know, and, who knows? perhaps this visit may redound to your advantage."

"Fire away," said Frank, who was beginning to be interested.

"In the first place, what was the occasion of your saying just now that you were lucky?"

"Because we had some wedding presents to pawn," answered the ingenuous Frank.

"No," corrected his wife gently, "because we had had some wedding presents to pawn."

"Dear me!" said the old gentleman, "they are all pawned then?"

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"Yes," answered Nellie, "but that does not make us unhappy."

"I suppose that you occupy a good position?" said the old gentleman to Frank.

"I have lost my position, sir," the latter answered.

"You have plenty of money in the bank?"

"None."

"Undoubtedly you have a well-stocked larder, though?"

"It is about exhausted."

"Of course, in case of real distress you have your parents to rely on?"

"On the contrary, we would not wish to ask them to help us under any circumstances."

"Well, young man," said the old gentleman, excitedly, "will you tell me what in the world you are going to do?"

"I would much rather have you tell me what I am going to do," answered Frank.

"Nothing," answered the old gentleman, solemnly.

"That's what I have been doing quite a while."

"The fact is," continued the old gentleman, "you are precisely what you were saying you were when I knocked on your door—you are lucky. I am a man of whimsicalities. I have been looking all my life for a happy married couple. Someone, never mind who, told me that you were the couple I was looking for. I did not believe it for a long time, but when I discovered that you were in hard luck, and still were not complaining, I began to believe it. My mission on earth is to assist happy couples who are in hard luck. That is the first time I have ever had a chance to fulfil my mission. It is all the more to your advantage, though—there is more money in the fund than there would be if the world were stocked with happy couples. I propose to settle on you a little income of five hundred a year."

The old gentleman paused to see what effect this startling announcement would have on the happy couple. The effect was not marked. They looked at him very much as they would look at a curiosity.

"I suppose you think I am an insane man?" he said angrily.

"No," answered Nellie, "but I think you are my father, with a wig and eyeglasses, and a very poor attempt at a disguised voice."

Saying which, she ran to him and threw her arms about his neck.

"Well, I am," said the old gentleman, laughingly, as he removed his disguise, "and I frankly confess that for a long time I have had a disguised heart. I didn't want to help you until I thought you needed it, so I waited. But I will tell you this—if you had acknowledged that you were not happy I would have given you double the allowance I have."

"I don't care," said Nellie. "I'm perfectly happy."

"And so am I," said Frank. **Stanley Hammond.**

Old Bellows: "Oh, for a thousand tongues!" Mrs. Bellows (facetiously): "What would you do with so many?" Old Bellows: "Raise a row with you and see if I couldn't get the best of it."

"Darling," he said, "your eyes are as bright as diamonds, your teeth as white as pearls, your lips as red as rubies, and——" "Yes, Horace," she replied sweetly, "and you're as green as an emerald." Then Horace went out into the jet black night.

Prospective Father (to young man): "Have you spoken to my daughter yet?" Young Man: "Oh, yes, sir." Father: "And she loves you?" Young Man (with enthusiasm): "You should have seen her hug me when I came to-night. Talk about love!"

She "I haven't anything new to sing to you to-night, George." He: "Well, give me something old then." She broke into a refrain that was "a song of the day" seventeen years before. He (at the close): "That's very, very old, Clara." She: "Yes, George; I sang that to you the night we became engaged."

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How She Lived, Loved, and Died.

Doctor Dene was a young man who by much over-study and superfluous cramming had managed to scrape through his many exams., gain his degree, and yet be one of the simplest men that ever ate bread and butter.

He had a good practice in a fashionable London suburb, and although too shy a man—apart from his professional character—ever to make many friends, especially among the fair sex, still he was universally admired for his skill and integrity, and laughed at as well, because of his extreme gullibility.

Instead of growing better in this respect as he grew older, the doctor suddenly became rapidly worse.

More dreamy, more absent-minded, more eccentric every day.

Truth to tell, Theodore Dene had fallen in love.

To a serious, single-minded, shy man, such as he, this was a fearful calamity.

He was in love without rhyme or reason either, which made it still more serious.

His divinity, too, was the veriest shrimp of a thing. Wasp-waisted, high-heeled, always fashionably dressed. The very sort of girl that a medical man, who hadn't quite forgotten all his anatomy, would tell you was a disgrace to civilisation.

She passed his house frequently, generally once a day; and looking up at his surgery window one morning—her big eyes had caught him peeping behind the blind—had made a conquest of him then and there.

All the years of his life—he was barely thirty now—he had ground away at his books and had never looked at a woman. He had had no little love affairs to knock off his bashfulness. No strolls by moonlight. No billets-doux. No bright telegraphic eyes ever to talk love's language with him. No sleepless nights.

Indeed, I am half ashamed to write about such a shockingly wasted life.

Kitty Coram—for that was the divinity's name—was very quick to perceive—as indeed, what ordinary woman is not?—the impression she made on the reticent, studious man. From a friend of hers—Gerald Thorncroft—she managed to glean a great deal at odd times about the doctor; of his goodness, his simpleness, his cleverness.

This Thorncroft had, indeed, studied for some time at the same college with Theodore Dene.

A man of the world, a dashing fellow was Gerald; handsome, passing rich, well connected, and a thoroughpaced scoundrel withal.

He paid assiduous court to Kitty, and at first she smiled on him, although, wondrous to relate, she kept herself as straight and pure as if she had a chaperon ever at her elbow. Self-reliant, witty, ambitious, Kitty did not let her morals run askew.

When she heard so much about the doctor, thought of the security of his position, the happy home he could offer a wife, a great disgust came over her for Gerald Thorncroft, with his swagger and dash and style.

"He swears he loves me. Yet he's never asked me to marry. If he did, he's drowning in debt, and would make a brute of a husband. Oh! if I could only marry Dr. Dene."

The thought grew in her mind until she could picture nothing else.

Poor little divinity! She was only a chorus-singer at a West End theatre. Her mother had been the same before her. Can you wonder that she wished for better things? Can you wonder that, born and bred behind the scenes, she grew sick and loth to lead such a life, and wondered how it would be when her beauty waned!

Her head was a clever as well as a pretty one, and this is how she set to work:

One day, passing the doctor's house, she caught him watching for her at his surgery window, which closely overlooked the road. Just as nervous and shy was he as any silly schoolgirl when she sees her lover in church.

Kitty, who was a first-rate actress, let her umbrella slip out of her hand, staggered a step or two, clutched wildly at the lamp-post, and finally fell very gracefully on the unimpressive pavement.

Dr. Dene was at her side in a moment. Lifting the little figure very tenderly in his arms he bore her to his surgery.

"She has fainted! Poor child!" he said compassionately to his housekeeper, who had been a witness to the scene. Mrs. Grant tossed her head, and deluged the pretty pale face with cold water.

This quickly brought Kitty to, and she went on with her acting.

She was better, much better. So ashamed and sorry to have given such trouble. Thank them both very much. She was quite ready to go now. She had not far to walk, only to Caraman Street.

The doctor told a white lie for once in his life, and stuck to it like a man.

"I am passing Caraman Street on a professional visit," he said. "May I offer to take you in my carriage?"

She refused very prettily and with sweet hesitation.

Half surprised at his own temerity, the doctor pressed the matter and over-ruled her objections.

Mrs. Grant tossed her head again as the little dainty thing went lightly down the steps on Dr. Dene's arm and then into Dr. Dene's carriage.

On the way, Kitty was talkative. Told the doctor all about herself. There was no mention of a theatre in her narrative though, nor of anything else connected with her real life. Just a cleverly-told, high-flown little fiction of fallen fortunes—a helpless orphan—no one to befriend her, and so on. The doctor

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was charmed with her woes, he would have asked her to marry him on the spot, if only he had dared.

She made good use of the twenty minutes' drive, you may be sure, and when they reached Caraman Street, she gave his hand ever so slight a pressure, and said modestly :

"I will ask you to set me down at the corner. My landlady is very strict, and might be harsh to me if she saw me get out of your carriage. Unfortunately for me I am in her debt, and the world is so censorious."

"How delicate! How thoughtful!" mused Theodore afterwards.

She no more lived in Caraman Street, reader, than you or I do. But before nightfall she had secured two top rooms in one of the highly respectable houses there ; had cut her connection with the theatre under the plea that she was going at once to America to join some rich relatives. Had even borrowed ten pounds from Gerald Thorncroft to aid her on her voyage out.

"You can pay me how and when you like, Kitty—in coin, or kisses, dear!"

"It won't be in kisses," said she, very scornfully ; and scarcely let him touch her hand when she said "Good-bye."

Then Kitty was taken ill in her grand new lodgings, and Theodore Dene attended her.

You can guess the consequence. The very first day she went out of doors, the doctor drove her to church and they were very quietly married.

Now you know by this time that Kitty was ambitious. Well, suppose we skip over ten years and find her, socially speaking, at the top of the tree. Her husband is a full-blown physician now—with a host of letters after his name and a title in front of it.

Kitty had looked upon life in London in the early part of their marriage as decidedly dangerous, and had induced her husband to take a practice in Scotland ; where, through Mrs. Dene's clever scheming, he had come under royal notice and quickly risen in royal favour. After ten years she considered herself sufficiently safe to come back to London. Lady Theodore Dene, the beautiful wife of the well-known physician, was not likely to be connected in any way with vanished Kitty Coram. It is wrong to tell a lady's age, and Lady Dene carried hers in her pocket. She looked about twenty-five, though really she was thirty.

We find her the belle of the season. People make a great fuss over her. By right of her wit and beauty she is a queen in Society's kingdom. Yet the throne she values highest is her place in her husband's heart. He loves her so loyally, so trustfully, so tenderly still. She is above rank and riches to him, she is his guiding star, his divinity.

He is never jealous of the admiration showered upon her. He is only too proud of her loveliness and fame. Kitty is giddy at the height she has reached. She never thinks of detection now.

You can guess what a blow it is to her when, coming out of a jeweller's in Bond Street, where she has been choosing a new setting for her diamonds, a gentleman raises his hat, stopping her in her way to her carriage, and addressing her in well-remembered tones.

"How do you do, Lady Dene? You're in danger of forgetting old friends, I fear. You've cut me once or twice in the park."

"Is it really you, Mr. Thorncroft? You have altered indeed. I should not have known you. It is a lovely day. Good morning."

With great *sang-froid* Lady Kitty, stepping into her carriage, says, "Home!" and drives away. It was a great shock to her nerves, but she was very plucky. Poor little fly! That was only the beginning of your trials; you are fairly caught in the subtle spider's web.

Day after day, wherever you go, you see him. He dares to write you disgustingly familiar notes, and finally frightens you into granting him interviews. Here, with boorish license, he makes love to you, rendering your golden life a tarnished misery.

"This must end," she says to him despairingly, in one of their *tête-à-têtes*

"So it shall, Kitty, when you consent to be mine! You fooled me years ago. I haven't forgotten or forgiven. You're a riper plum now, and I swear I will pluck you yet."

"I am rich," she said pleadingly. "I will give you anything you ask for if you will only cease tormenting me."

He laughed at her.

"I am twice as handsome as your dried up stick of a husband, who only married you because he was a fool. I don't want money. I want you. If you won't come of your own free will, I'll tell such tales of your past to the world that it will spit at you, and your saint of a doctor will turn you out of doors."

"I will defy you. I will tell him everything myself. I don't care what the world thinks, I only care for him."

"Couldn't trust you, Beauty," said Thorncroft, sneeringly. "You've lied so successfully all these years, that you couldn't tell the truth now if you tried. I should tell him I had a right to you as your lover. Get witnesses to swear we lived together before you threw me up for him."

"Heaven help me!" she sighed despairingly.

"All's fair in love and war, little woman. Cheer up. Take a run with me over to the Continent to-morrow. Be at Victoria in the afternoon. Don't stop to consider. Come."

"Give me time. Let me think."

"No! That's just what I don't want to do. If you're not there, I'll come to your grand house in the evening, and he'll turn you over to me himself, when he's heard my tale. Aye, and be glad to get rid of you."

Poor Kitty. What a sleepless night she passed. Kissing her wedding-ring with passionate pain, scalding it with her tears ; looking with loving, sorrowing eyes at her husband, smiling in his sleep. Praying, planning, plotting, all to no purpose. Anyway, she saw how certain her downfall was—how she must lose everything, even her husband's love. Her weak little word would never hold out against Gerald's plausible lies.

"*A lie, that is all a lie, can be met with and fought outright,*
But a lie that is half a truth is a harder matter to fight."

"Oh, that I could die! Thorncroft would surely spare me then."

Through the dark night she lay and pondered how. Poison? No! Too easily detected.

Drowning—hanging—she went through a list of deaths, but all were too palpable.

When morning dawned she was white and ill.

Dene stayed with her all the day, rested her aching head on his breast. She clung to him tremblingly in her despair.

They were to dine with an earl that night ; she would insist upon going. "The excitement will do me good," she said.

It was past six o'clock ; they had a long drive before them. He waited, watch in hand, at the head of his magnificent staircase, to conduct her down to the carriage. Her dressing-room door opened and out she came.

Dressed like a bride almost ; in purest ivory silk with draperies of rich old lace. Diamonds in her hair—round her fair throat—clasping her beautiful arms and gleaming from her breast. Her face was star-like in its loveliness, only so strangely pale.

"You should never wear anything but white, sweetheart," he whispered, offering his arm.

She turned and kissed him gratefully.

"Go back, dear, and ask Jane for my wedding-ring ; I left it on my dressing-table," she said.

As he passed away from her side, she threw herself forward with wild energy, down those many, many polished oaken stairs. Down! down! down! till she lay in a shapeless mass on the marble pavement below.

* * * * * *

"She was plucky to the end," said Thorncroft to himself as he read the many accounts of the beautiful Lady Dene's fatal accident, and heard of the letters of condolence that were showered on the bereaved husband from the highest quarters.

"No accident that, I know. Anyway I won't peach on her now. Wouldn't the world stare though if I showed it the flaw in Dr. Dene's divinity?"

Edith Dunaway.

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SPLENDID SERIAL.

Dupes of Destiny

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

By Blanche Eardley, Writer of "The Bond Between."

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY ARE:

SIR CYPRIAN RUST, who has inherited the baronetcy and estates of Sir Basil Wingate, though he is not the legal heir.

MARCELLA RUST, his daughter, a very lovely girl, who is greatly in love with

PHILIP NULLIUS, the curate of Crawley Village, where the home of Sir Cyprian, Wingate Court, is situated.

LADY VIOLET FRAYNE-LENNOX, whom Marcella believes to be her aunt. She is a very beautiful woman, and loves her niece dearly, but Sir Cyprian has, for some reason, immense power over her, which he uses to further his own ends.

EDWARD DAY is an orphan whom Lady Violet has befriended. He, however, in making unreturned love to Marcella, insults her, and Lady Violet refuses to have anything more to do with him.

CALEB J. JOHNSON, a City magnate and millionaire, who marries Lady Violet, though he knows that her husband is still alive. This husband,

MAJOR RICHARD FRAYNE-LENNOX, is a good-for-nothing, who has been turned out of the Army. Lady Violet believes him dead.

THIRTY-FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Meeting at the Court.

Marcella for two days had been free from the haunting presence of her father. Both he and the repulsive doctor had left hurriedly soon after the telegram had arrived, that had sent Sir Cyprian tearing out of the rooom forgetful of the errand on which he had brought his friend, Dr. Winter.

And when she had seen the carriage driving through the gates, Marcella had sighed with relief. She wandered about free from that dread of an unexpected terror without which she was never free when Sir Cyprian was watching her with those cold, smiling, blue eyes of his.

It was just as well that this was so, for she was now without the society of her faithful maid, Jane being ill in bed with pneumonia caught, the doctor said, through a sudden immersion in cold water. How Jane had managed to fall into the brook was a mystery, and seemed likely to remain one for some little time. She had been brought back by a carter some two hours after she had left the Court with Marcella's letter in her hand, which had, so Marcella supposed, drifted down the little brook.

She went through the gates of the Court and walked slowly towards the village. It was a pretty walk, and one that led through leafy wildernesses and undulating paths. She sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree that stretched across the lane. She was on part of the estate that belonged to the Court, and so feared no interruption. She was thinking of her lover, and her thoughts were full of sadness as she remembered how long it was since she had heard anything of him.

"Surely Aunt Violet has not forgotten me?" she mused. "It is a long time since I had a letter." Then she flushed as the vision of her aunt's beautiful face rose before her. "No, I will never think hardly of dear Aunt Violet," she murmured. "I will hope for brighter days, and if father and that hateful Dr. Winter stay away long enough, I may be almost happy at the Court, if I could just hear from Philip that all is well with him."

Suddenly she drew in her breath with a startled cry. A voice had sounded quite near her; a whisper of "Marcella" had reached her ears as vividly as though she had heard Philip in the flesh. She sprang to her feet, and gazed with startled eyes in the direction from which the voice had come. There was a rustle of leaves and twigs, then a man stepped from behind a large tree, and the next moment, sobbing with joy and relief, Marcella was once again clasped in the arms of the man she loved with all her heart.

"Philip, oh, Philip!" she cried. "Am I really looking at you, or is this some beautiful dream, darling?"

He pressed his lips to hers. "It is I, dearest love," he answered tenderly. "And I am never going to lose sight of you again, come what may. Oh, my love, when I think what you have endured for my sake, I feel I can never forgive——" he stopped suddenly. He remembered that his enemy was the father of the girl he loved.

She glanced up quickly. "Yes, I know," she murmured. "I guess why you pause, dearest. But tell me, Philip, how did you get here so suddenly? Why did you not write me?"

He drew her closer to him. How beautiful she looked with

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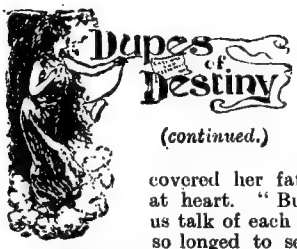

(continued.)

that light in her eyes, and her pale face was flushed again with love.

"I came here after one or two interesting adventures, sweetheart," he answered. He could not tell her that he had discovered her father to be almost a murderer at heart. "But," he went on quickly, "let us talk of each other now, darling. I have so longed to see your dear face and to kiss your beautiful mouth. Let us leave mysteries alone."

For a time the lovers were silent; they had forgotten the danger of being seen together by any of Sir Cyprian's spies, or by the baronet himself. They remembered only their love and that the world was a beautiful place after all.

Suddenly Marcella raised her head from Philip's shoulder. "Dearest," she said, "I can't stay long at the Court now. There are strange things happening here—mysteries I cannot fathom. There is a man with a black beard who comes and goes, and——"

Philip started. It was odd that he should also have seen such a man. He opened his mouth to speak, but Marcella clutched him tightly.

"There is someone looking for us, Philip. I can hear the rustling of the leaves in the distance. Perhaps father has returned from London! Oh, you must not meet him," she cried wildly.

Philip's mind was made up. "I shall not, darling. Just do as I tell you and be brave. Hide behind that great oak near that thicket, and don't make a sound; whoever that is shall not recognise me as Philip Nullius!"

But Marcella protested, bewildered. "I don't understand."

He drew her to him, then pressed his lips to hers. "You will soon, my darling love; only obey me if you love me."

With a tender look she disappeared behind the tree, and drawing something from his pocket, Philip quickly and accurately transferred to his head and face the grey wig, beard, and moustache that the girl Lottie had given him.

Then he turned the rim of his hat down, and the collar of his coat up, and after one quick glance into a pocket mirror, and a whispered word to the wondering girl behind the tree, he stepped forward in the guise of the "Vicar" to meet the man who, impatiently beating the brambles and bushes with a stick, came out into the open.

THIRTY-FIFTH CHAPTER.

Philip Learns Something.

The man who stumbled before Philip from behind the thick bushes of the wilderness was not the man whom Marcella had dreaded meeting, and whom Philip had acknowledged to himself that it would be awkward to speak with in the near presence of his sweetheart, for he had things to say to Sir Cyprian Rust that he could never say before his innocent daughter. So it was with a sense of relief that he saw another man in the place of the baronet.

The intruder was, however, no stranger to Philip Nullius, and it was with difficulty that he refrained from betraying his personality through his disguise, as he looked upon the face of the man Boulter, whom he had seen on several memorable occasions, the last being the day before on the platform at Paddington with the man with the black beard!

He was so concerned with his own amazement at encountering his enemy within the very precincts of his lady love's home, that he at first was oblivious to the impression his own appearance made upon Boulter. It was growing dusk, and they stood beneath the shadows cast by the trees overhead, but in the gloom Boulter's face took unto it an expression of frank amazement and perplexity. And when he spoke Philip knew the reason of his astonishment.

"Why, what on earth are you doing up here, 'Vicar'?" he said hoarsely. "I thought you decided that it was safest to keep at Water Grange? Anyway, the 'Spade' would be wild if he knew you had risked everything just to look round here. It's not safe, you know—if you don't mind my telling you."

While he had been speaking Philip had grasped the clue to his further conduct. This man Boulter had taken him for the man as whom the girl Lottie had disguised him. If he could keep it up he would be able to come to some conclusion regarding much that puzzled him.

The real "Vicar" had spoken with a curiously American accent, and in his schooldays Philip had been no mean mimic of other people's voices. He would see whether he still possessed that gift. It would, perhaps, help him to learn a little of what was going on behind the scenes of the mystery into which he had been dragged.

He opened his mouth, and then, seized with a sudden idea, took from his pocket the spade guinea he had picked up in London when the man with the beard had dropped it. He had noticed a bright gleam of something yellow shining in the other man's hand, and had wondered whether it was a coin similar to the one in his possession.

The effect upon Boulter was not entirely unexpected. He laughed and opened his hand, showing a spade guinea lying in the hollow of it.

"Oh, it's all right with me, 'Vicar'!" he said. "I thought you would have dropped showing the sign with *me*—we are such old pals."

Philip smiled grimly; then he had been right! The spade guinea was a sign between the "Vicar" he was personating and the man with the black beard, as well as the scoundrel Boulter—a sign of some secret confederation, and one in which villainy largely predominated. Acting swiftly upon his intention to learn as much as he could about this secret society, he said, in the drawling, nasal tones of the master of Water Grange:

"I came up here to have a look round for purposes of my own. But what brings you here, Boulter? I thought you had your instructions to meet the 'Spade' in London. Why didn't you?"

His chance shot was a lucky one. The man replied glibly:

"I did meet him at the station, and got his instructions about that wretched parson chap we've got to track down. The 'Spade' seems to fear him more than anyone else—even the scent of the police on the 'Mona Lisa' is nothing to him so long as the sky-pilot is at large; of course it's our duty to do all we can to help the 'Spade' but I'd like to be a little more in the know, wouldn't you? So far as I can make out this sky-pilot stands in the 'Spade's' way."

Philip smiled beneath the disguise of hair on his face. So far he was succeeding better than he had anticipated, but he would learn more before he finished with the loquacious Boulter.

"Oh, I dare say the 'Spade' has a good reason for wishing the parson out of the way," he muttered; "but did he give you any further orders that should bring you up here? It's risky, I should say, to be hanging round this part!" Another chance shot that also went home.

"I don't know," Boulter answered cautiously. "I've not been up here for a long time, and the last time I was dressed as a farm labourer, so I would not be known; anyway, the 'Spade' sent me himself to be on the look out for a day or so, in case that sky-pilot returned here, and"—he lowered his voice cautiously—"there's some talk about the 'tecs nosing round; it appears they've got hold of some clue that has sent them into this part of the country to investigate. Anyway, the 'Spade' said I was to be about here a day or two, because the 'swag' is concealed here; besides I wanted to have a look at that girl. I intended mentioning all this to you when I got back to the Grange," he finished. "Now tell me why you've trotted up here; who's in charge while you are away?"

Philip hesitated. "Oh, the others will see to things," he murmured. He was trying to find a way out of the maze of perplexity into which his companion's speech had flung him. "I really intended calling to hear if the curate had been seen

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at his lodgings;" he went on quickly, feeling the other man's eyes fixed on him strangely. "I'm not afraid of being noticed; this coat and hat make an effective yet quiet disguise! By-the-way, it's a nuisance those papers were missing from his rooms when Rayne went to get them!" he added, with a sudden thought, remembering that there had been a strangely mysterious reason for those letters and papers of his to be found.

Boulter laughed softly. "Yes, the 'Spade' was wild about it; it seems he wanted them most of all. They were nearly as important as the parson himself! But there is to be a meeting at the Grange, so the 'Spade' told me, and he's going to be there. He said he would distribute details about that fresh deal we shall be working soon, and he intended seeing you one day about it!"

"Ah!" Philip murmured thoughtfully. "I shall be pleased to listen to the Chief's orders. By-the-way, have you any letters of the 'Spade's'? I should like to have one of them. He has not written much except in cipher lately," he said, remembering the words of the man in the black beard.

"I've only a few papers," Boulter answered slowly. "Most of them are not written by the Chief himself; he's too sharp to put his hand to anything that will incriminate himself, but he's got someone else to write for him. They're the names of the new 'cribs' to be 'cracked,' and a list of the principal valuables. You know the 'Spade' never bothers about cheap stuff. But he don't expect to get such a haul as he did with the 'Mona Lisa' at that millionaire's place."

"Ah!" said Philip quickly. "That was exceptional luck, of course. But I hope the 'Spade' will drop hunting that parson down—it will recoil on his own head if he does, I feel sure of it. The fellow's harmless and quiet, and if left alone will do no harm; but I am afraid that things will go wrong with the 'Spade' if he tackles him again!"

Boulter laughed harshly. "What! Turning saint, 'Vicar'! Don't go and say you're going to play King's Evidence after all the years we've pulled together! The 'Spade' would get his own back, you know. He'd stick at nothing—he'd soon knife you, or get someone else to do it. Do you remember that informer he got put away for trying that game on with us?"

A slight shiver shook Philip from head to foot. In the presence of so much cold-blooded villainy he felt inclined to take the man by his neck and shake the life out of him; but prudence, and something else—a regard for the safety of the girl he loved, whom he knew was listening in bewilderment to their conversation, held his tongue; besides, he wanted to get something definite out of the man, so that he would be enabled to place the facts in the hands of the police and run this gang to earth.

"I'm not likely to betray those whose cause I uphold," he said slowly. "But there is danger ahead for the 'Spade,' if he insists, for no reason whatever, in hunting the innocent. That curate, after all, did not even know the 'Spade'."

"There you are wrong!" was the quick retort. "The 'Spade' was well acquainted with the parson, and it's my own private opinion that it is because this parson by being alive threatens the 'Spade's' position. But no one can drag the 'Spade' from his place without injuring the innocent whom he uses as his tools! He's a darned clever man, and will never be traced. Although the 'Mona Lisa' was his plan, there's not a sign to show that he had a personal hand in it, except the coin that fool the 'Shovel' must have dropped out of his pocket!" He laughed softly. "No, the 'Spade' had a splendid decoy for that lay!"

A slight rustle behind the tree where Marcella was hiding made both men start—one with suspicion, the other with fear lest she should be discovered.

"What's that?" Boulter said sharply, and, taking a step forward. "If there's anyone listening, I'll soon know what to do!"

Philip grasped his arm roughly. "Don't be a fool, Boulter!" he said in a voice that trembled in spite of the drawl. "How can anyone be there!" He stopped suddenly.

Boulter had again looked at him strangely, and Philip's face flushed beneath his disguise.

"Very well, of course if you are certain," the other said grumblingly, "I'll not bother. By-the-way, 'Vicar,' I shall get some papers of rather rare value to us from the 'Spade' to-morrow night. Will you meet me here about nine, and I'll show them to you—that is, if you are staying longer in this place," he added quickly.

Philip agreed readily. He wanted to get hold of tangible proof of the 'Spade's' villiany, and that of his confederates, and could hope to do so only by strategy and an equal cunning. If he could but learn the reason of the mysterious 'Spade's' antipathy and loathing for himself, he would be glad. It was bad enough to know that Marcella's father was against him, and had some acquaintance with the powerful incognito, to have trusted his satellites with the charge of abducting him to Water Grange.

He compelled himself to part on friendly terms with Boulter, who went in the same manner as that in which he had arrived, and disappeared among the bushes and trees, an odd little smile puckering his sardonic mouth as though he had experienced some new pleasure in speaking with the 'Vicar,' whom he had imagined to be still at Water Grange.

Philip watched him out of sight, and waited until he felt quite certain of the man being far enough away from him for it to be impossible for him to overhear anything that happened on the spot he had just left. Then, hastily freeing himself from his ugly disguise, he ran to the tree behind which he knew Marcella had been so long in hiding.

THIRTY-SIXTH CHAPTER.

By Woman's Wit.

"PHILIP! Philip!" she cried, turning her white, tearful face to him, upon which were traces of the agony she had endured. "That man! That awful man! The things he said about the 'Mona Lisa' that was stolen from Mr. Johnson's. How could you let him speak so familiarly to you?" she went on, puzzled. "For whom did he take you?"

Philip hesitated, then, drawing her into his arms, said tenderly: "For a man who is just as wicked and cruel as himself, my darling. The disguise I put on made him think I was his friend, and I encouraged him to speak as he did, because, by so doing, I hope to discover a strange and deeply-laid plot that will be the means of handing over to justice several clever rogues. But you must not be frightened, sweetheart," he went on soothingly. "I am able to fight with my own weapons of truth and honesty. Come," he added, "you must let me see you safely within the walls of the Court before I leave you again."

Marcella seized his arm and said impressively: "Philip, don't meet that man to-morrow night without being armed. Oh, my dear!" she cried. "I know my woman's instinct told me that that man was only talking like that to get you into a trap! He meant to play you some trick—to put you out of his way by some cunning deed! Promise," she pleaded, "that you will take someone with you who will be able to defend you should he want to play you false!"

Philip gazed into her beautiful, eager face with a loving

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(*continued.*)

smile. How he thanked God for the heart of this pure, tender woman.

"Darling," he said earnestly, "you need have no fear for me this time. That man Boulter thought I was his confederate! Why should he mean treachery to his friend? Don't be afraid, my dearest; I shall learn a great deal that will be valuable, and I promise you that I will take care of myself for your dear sake," he added, kissing her trembling lips tenderly. His love for her then was greater than ever.

Marcella sighed. She saw argument was useless, and her heart was too full to dwell on the subject further. "I hope you may be right," she murmured, "and that my doubts are unfounded. But since I have had so much mystery to combat, and so many uncanny experiences at the Court, I am not surprised at anything that may happen. But promise at least that before you go you will meet me at half-past eight to-morrow."

At the Court gates the lovers parted regretfully, with renewed vows of tenderness and love. And Philip swung lightly down the drive, Marcella gazing after him into the gloom.

"Until to-morrow night at half-past eight," she murmured, then the great gate closed with a harsh clang that jarred upon her, and she went thoughtfully into the house. In the hall she met Deacon, Sir Cyprian's valet. He had been to the post-bag, and in his hand were several letters. "Are there any letters for me, Deacon?" she said eagerly.

The man looked at her sharply. "No, miss—only for Sir Cyprian," he answered civilly.

Marcella glanced wistfully at the letters in his hand—one envelope looked as though it might have been from her Aunt Violet; she thought it was just like those she always used. She put out her hand impulsively, "Let me see them?"

Deacon shook his head regretfully, yet firmly. "I'm very sorry, miss, but it's my orders direct from Sir Cyprian that he sees the letters before anyone else."

"But surely, while my father is away, the letters are not sent on to him before other people are allowed to see them?" she protested haughtily.

A malicious twinkle shot from the man's narrow little eyes as he replied urbanely, "Those are the master's orders, miss; I dare not disobey him."

Marcella shrugged her shoulders resignedly. She knew from bitter experience that her father's servants would lie and perjure their very souls for love of him. Sir Cyprian exercised an almost heathenish fascination over his domestics, and Marcella realised that for him they would walk through fire and water if need be, while for her their allegiance was only perfunctory at the best of times, except poor old Jane's, who was unable to be of any assistance for some time to come.

The following day she spent in her bedroom, and when dusk fell she set out to meet her lover. She was very pale, and her great brown eyes burnt as though some hidden fire smouldered behind them. Her gown was black, a great heavy cloak covered her, and in her arms she held a large bottle full of some dark liquid. As she neared the outer gates of the Court, a man stepped from behind a tree and went up to her. She drew back with a smothered cry.

The man laughed softly. "Forgive me, darling! I forgot you would not recognise me in this get-up; you have not forgotten my appointment for this evening, have you?"

Marcella breathed a low, glad little cry as her lover's arms closed round her. "Oh, Philip, dearest! At first I thought that—it was someone else!" Then she added—"No, I had not forgotten your appointment—we have a few moments before you go yet."

Philip kissed her passionately on her red, tender mouth. "My darling! I wish I had never to leave you again—but I hope to-night to put my disguise to some good purpose, and perhaps learn something that has long puzzled me."

Her arms tightened round him. "Dearest," she said with a half tremulous laugh, "you will think me very foolish, but—but—I remembered that it was a cold night, and you would have a long time to wait about, so I brought some wine out with me. I hoped, for my sake," she continued earnestly, "that you would drink some. Please, please, Philip," she pleaded, "don't refuse."

Philip hesitated. He had no desire to drink the wine, but seeing that Marcella was so prettily concerned for him, he resolved to do as she asked.

"Very well, dearest; I will drink a little of your wine," he laughed, "but I really don't need it. I am afraid you are spoiling me."

Marcella's eyes shone with relief. "Then, dear, I will give it to you in the old summer house," she returned. "It is only a minute's walk."

He followed her to the ivy covered arbour, and, taking a small tumbler from the pocket in her cloak, Marcella poured out a glassful of the wine. "There, that will warm you," she murmured.

He took the glass from her and drained it obediently. It certainly was comforting, but there was a strange taste about it that might have been a bitter one, it was so pungent and strong.

"Now for a few moment's talk before I go to the wilderness," he said tenderly, drawing her down beside him on the rustic seat. "I shall make the most of my opportunity to-night, and then, with those papers that that man mentioned, perhaps I may be able to bring a great wrong to justice."

Marcella murmured a few words of loving sympathy. She could not talk; something held her tongue, and she sat in an agony of suspense, gazing at her lover's dark, intense face with eager yet frightened eyes. Suddenly she saw Philip half rise from the seat, then fall back. "Marcella!" he cried sharply, "it is time I went, yet my limbs feel as heavy as lead. What am I to do?"

She pushed him down gently on to the seat. "Wait here, darling," she said tenderly. Then after a pause his head grew heavy on her shoulder, and she breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"Thank God!" she murmured. "I feel so cruel having played him such a trick, but it is for his own dear sake. I could not let him go to meet treachery. He will be safe here—until I return."

Pressing one long kiss upon the sleeping man's brow, she left the summer house, and soon was running with swift, noiseless steps in the direction of the wilderness.

The parish church clock struck a quarter to the hour when she arrived, breathless, at the place where Philip had met the strange man the day before. "There is still time," she murmured softly, then hastily flinging the black cloak upon the ground she placed the bottle of wine she had still carried on top of it, and upon the whole she threw a white handkerchief.

"I think that will do; it looks careless, and as though someone would return for it soon!" Then she listened keenly; above the low moaning of the wind among the trees, she heard a crashing noise, as though someone were trying vainly to force a way through the blackness of the night to where she stood waiting—waiting, for what?

Then with one swift glance at the cloak and the bottle on the ground, Marcella slipped behind a tree, just as two men came out into the open.

* * * * *

More than half an hour went by. The pale moon, rising higher in the heavens as night advanced, fell full upon two motionless figures lying side by side, and not far from one was a broken bottle.

A woman crept softly up to one of the figures, and, leaning over it, searched with white, trembling fingers one man's coat and pockets, doing the same with the other motionless sleeper. At last her search was satisfied, and she rose from her crouching attitude with a sigh of relief. In her hand was a packet of papers, and her big brown eyes flashed with triumph, as she flung the cloak round her shivering shoulders

(Continued on page 254.)

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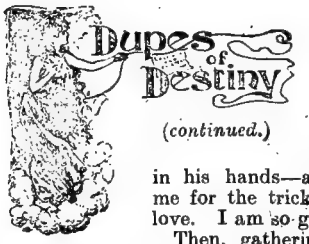

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once again. "I was right," she murmured. "There was a plot—a cruel wicked plot to silence him, and thank God for my woman's instinct that told me I guessed correctly! Now to go and put these papers in his hands—and to beg him to forgive me for the trick that was prompted by my love. I am so glad I accomplished it."

Then, gathering up her skirts, she ran swiftly through the darkness and gloom, stumbling over the mounds of earth and broken branches that had fallen across the path, flying with dishevelled hair and triumphant eyes towards the summer house, while clasped to her bosom was the packet of papers for which she had staked so much to lose—or win.

THIRTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Sealed Lips.

Two days later Philip Nullius sat in his old rooms near the parish church, reading the papers that his brave devoted little love had obtained for him. His first sensation on recovering from the deep sleep into which he had been drugged after drinking the wine Marcella had given him had been one of amazement and fear, lest he had, after all, missed learning so much that he had counted upon. But when he understood that it was a woman's unerring instinct which had saved him, and at the same time outwitted his enemies, he had owned with a throb of shame that had he listened to the girl who had loved him so devotedly, her young life would not have been risked, as it most assuredly had been, in the carrying out of so hazardous an undertaking.

He was now turning over the packet of miscellaneous papers with a sense of disappointment. They were memoranda consisting mostly of dates and ambiguous sentences, that only those understanding the allusions hidden between the lines could follow.

"These are not of much use to me," he said slowly. "They implicate no one; even if I were to hand them over to the police, they would know no more than I do now, unless this last paper contains more detail." He opened it curiously. It was a curt note of but a few stilted phrases, but as Philip Nullius looked more closely into it, a startled expression leapt into his dark eyes, and his face paled to a deathly whiteness.

"It can't be," he muttered hoarsely. "My God! to imagine for a moment that such a madness can exist! Yet it is in the same writing—the same queer little characteristics. There is no mistaking it—in doubting the hideous truth!"

He rose from his chair and paced the floor with quick, impatient steps. His mind was divided between two things—love and duty—and he knew that in the performance of his duty he would drag his love down into the dust with shame and horror.

This evidence which had fallen so strangely into his hands would startle the entire world of criminal investigation, and place in the possession of the authorities of Scotland Yard the person of the notorious leader of the most dangerous gang of burglars—the man whose sobriquet was a menace in itself to those who, though never having seen him or heard his voice, recognised his master brain that planned out the daringly audacious raids that had earned for him the questionable nickname of the "Spade." And the simple fact of placing the letter he had just read, and the one he had taken from his own drawer to compare with it, would make the blood of the chiefs in unravelling crime thrill with delight at the prospect of getting into their hands the mysterious King of Burglars.

"What am I to do?" he muttered, after a fruitless ten minutes' ramble to and fro his small sitting-room. "There seems to be no other course open but to keep silence—I dare not speak—I dare not with my own hand kill the heart that loves me—I must let Justice play her own game—I will not place the best trump in her grasp."

He brushed his hair back from his brow, which was lined with thought and perplexity. "No, I will not, even to aid the law of my country, stir one inch towards bringing this mysterious leader of criminals to the tribunal that awaits him. I can't be doing wrong," he mused; "surely it is the only course open to me—the one chance I have of warding off sorrow and shame from the innocent."

He crossed the room to the fire and held over the flames the two papers that would hurt more in proportion to the good they would accomplish. As the blaze caught and licked them up, he did not know that he would shortly regret that act of generosity more than any other in his life.

As he moved away he murmured again: "It is better so—far, far better that I should do that than send them to Scotland Yard with the information I possess." Then his face clouded, and he shut his teeth sharply together at the thought of the mercy an unscrupulous villain was receiving on account of the innocent dependent upon him.

"One day he shall know! One day I shall reveal my knowledge and then I shall give no quarter!" he said, as the last flicker died in the grate and ashes only remained.

Then, packing a few things into a bag, and writing a loving note to Marcella, telling her not to worry about him, as he was going to London to see the authorities at the Foundling Hospital where he had been brought up, in order to ascertain about the details of his birth, also that he had destroyed the papers as they were of no value after all, Philip caught the up-train to town, and neither he, nor the man whose enmity was pursuing him so relentlessly, knew that they had passed on the line, one returning to Crawley to resume life as the country gentleman, and the other to London, to try to trace, for his sweetheart's sake, the mystery that surrounded his life.

THIRTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER.

"She is your Mother!"

Marcella, on the night of her lover's departure to London, felt a renewal of the interest in the woman whom she had seen concealed in the hidden wing of the subterranean corridor.

Her father was still away, and, catching sight of Deacon disappearing towards the door that led into the passage, she waited until his steps had died away; then, creeping up to it, she pushed the door gently.

It yielded immediately, and she quickly slipped past it, and closed it noiselessly on the other side. She very soon found herself near the panelled door of the room at the end of the underground passage. Not a sound could she hear; it was almost as though she were in a silent tomb of death—so chilly and awesome was the atmosphere. She raised one corner of the curtain that hung before the glass panels, and looked into the room. It was brightly illuminated with electric light, and to her surprise she saw Deacon speaking with a tone of command to the woman she had seen before, whose white, frightened face was even thinner and more wild-looking than ever.

"You've got to do as you're told," he said roughly; "and if you start any of your nonsense, you'll be put somewhere else where it won't matter how much noise you make. Come along, you take that medicine without any more to do."

"No, no!" wailed the low voice. "I don't like it; I took some before and it was nasty. I won't take any more," and she retreated further against the wall, holding out one white, thin hand as though afraid of being struck.

Deacon's dark face scowled savagely. "You wait—you precious bundle of bones. I've got my orders to see to, and one of 'em is that you take your medicine regular or there'll be a nice little surprise for you from someone else."

A terrified glance crept into the delicate face. "You mean—you mean—him?" she whispered.

(Another long instalment of this serial next week.)

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

A Lover's Complaint.

I am sorry, "Walter," that you can so seldom see your sweetheart by yourself in the evenings when you call, as the members of her family are so plentiful. You say: "Would you advise me to call in the mornings, when I am sometimes free?" I certainly should not. If you are free yourself in the mornings, I don't suppose she will be. Besides, girls don't like morning sweethearts. They never feel they look their best then, and are nearly always busy. I suppose now that Spring is not far off, you will be able to take her out more for walks, so the family grievance will not fall so heavily on you.

Lady Detectives.

"Can a girl become a lady detective?" asks "Flossie." "I have a great gift for finding out things about people, and my friends often say I should make a splendid detective. Now, is there any kind of opening for me, do you think?"

* * * * *

There are lady detectives, but I don't think it is a kind of profession I would advise any girl to take up of her own free will. There is no official position for a lady in the detective force, as the Scotland Yard authorities do not, I believe, engage women. If a woman is employed, it is an affair arranged privately between herself and a male detective who wants her services. Some private detective agencies employ ladies. Their work consists chiefly in watching people's movements, and in finding out their secrets by means of tricks. It is, no doubt, a fascinating occupation to read stories about, but I don't think I should like any girl friend of mine to follow it up, as spying and prying do not make a woman's character lovable.

A Melancholy Youth.

"F.," aged nineteen, writes me the following gloomy lines: "What is wrong with me? I am always brooding and melancholy. I dislike the society of other people, and only like to be by myself. I always look on the black side of everything, and think I have no prospects in life, and am of no use in the world. Can you suggest a remedy?"

* * * * *

There is no remedy, except those which "F." alone has the power to take. It is not unusual at the age of nineteen for a young man to look at things in the light you speak of. The best thing to do is to keep the mind as fully occupied as possible. Get more work than you can do, and even if you do not, as you say, like the society of other people, I should cultivate it. It will certainly help you to get out of your melancholy state. And, in not very many years, you will be a changed being. It is wonderful how sensible and practical many a dreamer has been known to turn out in after life.

Resuming an Old Acquaintance.

Six years ago, "T. G. W." was very friendly with a girl he met while on his school holidays. Since then he has never seen her. He feels that he would like to meet her again, but does not like to write. He saw her once, but she did not recognise him, as he has probably altered a great deal.

* * * * * *

Why not write to her? You were on intimate terms then, so it would not be resented if you tried to resume an old acquaintance.

Sending Presents to an Engaged Man.

"A. W." writes: "Would you tell me if it is right for a young lady friend of mine to write letters and send presents to the young man I am engaged to?"

* * * * * *

It doesn't seem altogether right. Find out the facts. Is she sending him letters and presents just out of friendship, or in kindness to him, or are they being sent as tokens of love? Ask the young man straight out what is the meaning of the affair, and if he confesses that he is carrying on a double game, I should ask him to cease at once, or cancel the engagement. But before you take any such steps, find out the facts of the case. It may after all be a mere harmless bit of pleasantry on the girl's part.

Servants as Wives.

"Working Man" wishes to marry, and asks my advice as to the best kind of girl for him to choose. "Do you think a servant would suit me best, as being more used to household work?"

* * * * *

I do not see why a servant should not make "Working Man" as good a wife as a girl of any other class. But he should not run away with the idea that she will be a good wife because she has been a servant. After all, there is nothing much in common between the life of a girl who has to do the work of a family of good position, and one who has to make both ends meet in a much smaller dwelling. Servants are not generally the most economical of people, and are, I am afraid, often given to waste. However, such faults as that should soon be lost in married life. I merely mention them because "Working Man" should be prepared to take such things into consideration when seeking for a wife.

The Loveless Man.

"What is the matter with me?" writes "Francis." "I cannot fall in love. I am twenty-four, and have met dozens of girls who have seemed to like me, but I have never yet felt any kind of tender feeling towards them. Is there anything wrong with me, and, if so, what is the best cure?"

* * * * *

While I am sorry "Francis" is so cold in his affections, I do not know that there is anything wrong with him. Not everybody has it in him to be deeply in love. The nearest approach is a lasting friendship. "Francis" should on no account think himself the victim of anything wrong. If he wishes to get married, then he had bet'er cultivate the acquaintance of as many girls as possible. The one with whom he feels he has most in common, he should try to learn to love, if she returns his liking for her. It is of no use for a man of "Francis'" disposition to go with the expectation of being suddenly love-stricken. He is not, evidently, built that way, and if he ever does love, it will be more the platonic but sincere affection than the passionate feeling.

Cynthia

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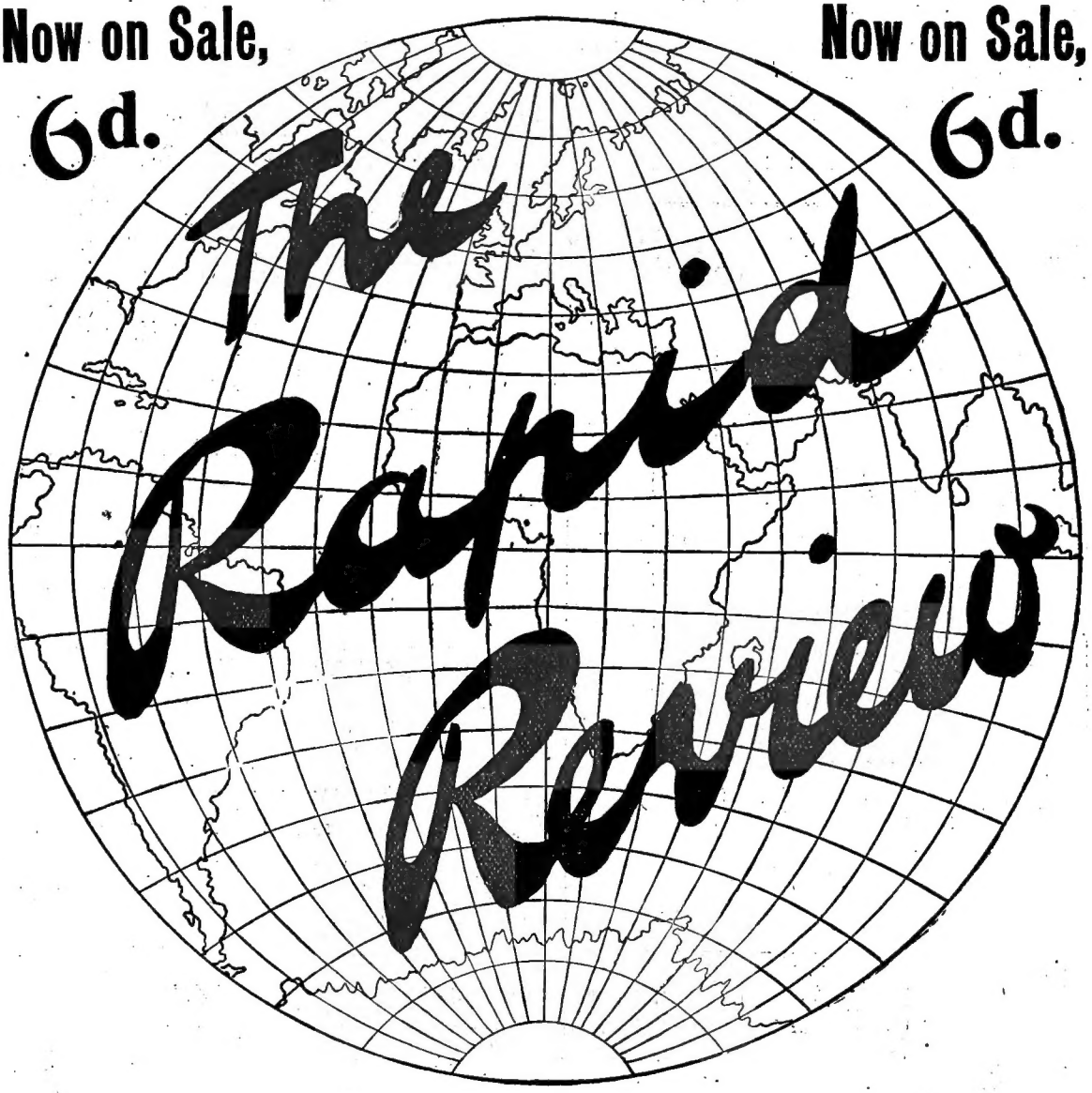

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